NEA Today

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The Newspaper for Members of the National Education Association

The Cat Is Back!
Read Across America coverage starts on page 2

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

America's reading—and NEA members are leading the way.

see page 4

NEA Today

January 1999
Volume 17, Number 4

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recycled paper

Read Across America Returns!

President's Viewpoint

The dapper Cat in the Hat and the definitive National Academy of Sciences make a great team.

Last year on March 2, the late Dr. Seuss's birthday, NEA and its friends organized a national read-in.

We wanted to concentrate the minds of adults on the importance and joy of reading books to small children.

We called our event Read Across America, and, frankly, it succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. Almost a million NEA members and 10 million children took part.

Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, once wrote: "When I am reading a book, whether wise or silly, it seems to me to be alive and talking to me." Never before had Swift's famous words been tested on such a grand scale. Read Across America was truly a Swiftian experience.

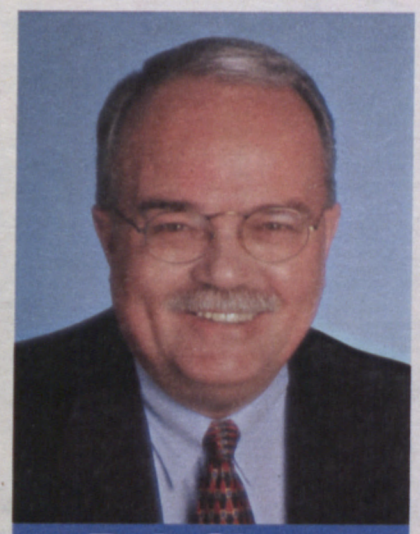
And this year we're doing it again. Read Across America returns because really important messages bear repeating, and few messages are more important: Read a book to a child, and you'll be making a world of difference in that child's life.

What's more, we're convinced that we can use this year's Read Across America as a springboard to do something even more lasting in the cause of literacy.

Last year, with a protean boost from the wonderful Dr. Seuss, Read Across America connected public educators with people from every walk of American life. This year's celebration promises to be even bigger, better, and bolder—as you'll see on page 6.

But there's only so much we can accomplish in one day, once a year.

We need to think beyond one day, and now is an excellent time for us to be taking the initiative in reading. The mini-war between phonics and whole language is ending. The recent release of the National Academy of Sciences report on reading brought down the curtain on this ridiculous conflict. Common sense, research, and pragmatism are winning out over ideology.



Bob Chase

In reading the Academy's report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, I kept hearing the words of the reading teacher who has endeavored to educate me, a middle school teacher with no training in the teaching of reading.

"Bob, it's not an either-or proposition. An effective reading program integrates both whole language—literature—and phonics."

Well, after the most thorough examination to date of research about reading, a "balanced" reading program is what the Academy recommends, too.

"Research consistently shows that children who get off to a good start in reading rarely stumble," the Academy report notes. "Those who fall behind tend to stay behind for the rest of their academic lives."

We already know that some children are far more likely than others to have difficulties learning to read. Let's be prepared, the Academy urges, to get these children the help they need—before they fail in school, before they are labeled, and before costly remediation is necessary.

I also recommend to you the National Research Council's somewhat more user-friendly spin-off of the Academy's report, *Starting Out Right, A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success.*

Starting Out Right emphasizes the complex nature of teaching reading: "In just about every school in America, some kids enter the first grade reading on a third grade level, whereas others are not able to reliably recognize all the letters of the alphabet. Teachers, most of them faced with more than 20 children, have to find ways to make sure that each child makes progress every day."

In other words, the teaching of reading is, in fact, rocket science.

Since every child should be reading at grade level by the beginning of the fourth grade—and about 40 percent are not—the challenge for America's professional educators is clear: What can we do to help every child become a skilled and enthusiastic reader?

> We can use Read Across America as a springboard to do something even more lasting in the cause of literacy.

If you have suggestions, send them to our NEA reading initiative coordinator Barbara Yentzer at byentzer@nea.org.

The historian Edward Gibbon once said that an "early and invincible love of reading" was worth more to him than all the treasures of India. A nation of invincible young readers—now there's a goal worth striving for.

Comments? You can E-mail me directly at BobChase@nea.org.

For copies of Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children *and* Starting Out Right, *contact National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20005, 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu.*

NEA at a Glance

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Did You Know...
NEA and the Journalism Education Association are developing the NEA Innovation in Literacy Promotion Award. The $1,000 award will be given to the student staffers of a high school newspaper, yearbook, or magazine who present the best proposal for increasing literacy in their community through journalism. For details, call NEA's Daaiyah Bilal at 202/822-7797.

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NEA Today January '99

NEA's Cat-a-list

Sandy Schaefter

Who better to recommend good children's books to parents than NEA members? So sometime before March 2, Dr. Seuss's 95th birthday, NEA will launch its 1999 Read Across America celebration by releasing a definitive list of members' top 100 children's books. You can help determine this "cat-a-list for reading" by casting a vote for your five favorite books for kids from birth to age 12—and encouraging your colleagues to do the same. How? By sending your five picks and your name to Children's Book List, NEA, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, or by voting online at www.nea.org/readacross/catalist.html. The deadline: February 1.

Jennifer Giesey

4 Raring To Read
Want to improve reading instruction and get kids—like 10-year-old Kyle Fox (above)—excited about reading? On page 4, check out an impressive new reading program in Livonia, Michigan. On page 5, find ideas from NEA members all over the country who know how to make reading fantastic fun. And on page 6, get the latest research on teaching reading right, a list of resources to get you going, and tips for joining NEA's reading celebration.

Cover photo by Ken Blevins/AP Wide World

Newsmakers

7 In the Nation
Voters put more public education advocates in Congress. The question: Will they deliver?

8 At the Ballot Box
Children and public education, not party labels, come first. A look at bipartisan success in Illinois.

9 In the States
In Pennsylvania, NEA members and veterans use common cents to find common cause in education. A penny for your thoughts.

10 On Your Side
Just four miles from the Canadian border, a handful of bus drivers and custodians (below) organize to fight harassment for union activity.

11 At the Local Level
A local NEA affiliate in DeKalb County, Georgia, signs up 30 new members a week. Key to its success: harnessing the power of volunteers.

Learning

16 Innovators
Alberto Rodriguez (below) finds even the top Latino and African-American students aren't scoring as high as top whites and Asians. Why not?

20 Professional Growth
Pre-service teachers connect with kids—and reality—through a veteran educator in rural Mississippi.

23 Inside Scoop
Heard of reconstituted orange juice? How about reconstituted schools? Will they be able to replace failing ones?

25 Rights Watch
Students who are sexually harassed by teachers can rarely force schools to pay damages. So says the Supreme Court.

26 Bits & Bytes
Does *Beowulf* scare you? Never fear. An English teacher has created software to help kids of all ages crack the classics.

Life

35 In the Light Lane
Get laughs here, as students provide wild definitions of a shake down, extension cords, embalming, and more.

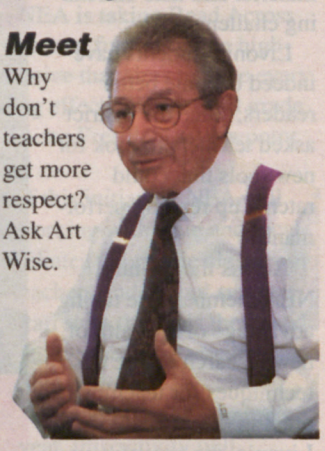
36 People
Somewhere over the rainbow—and in the distant past—Nevada third grade teacher Phyllis Morton (below) played a Munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz* and acted in 30 other films.

38 Money
Time to start thinking about estate planning? You're never too young or too poor to start, says Texas school electronics technician Carlos Villarreal, Jr.

Voices

41 My Turn
A school secretary in Michigan worries that today's school office workers aren't prepared for the changes that are coming.

42 Meet
Why don't teachers get more respect? Ask Art Wise.



43 Debate
Should today's education be relevant to tomorrow's job market? NEA members in Florida and Illinois thrash it out.

45 Books
Is there or is there not a crisis in public education? A noted researcher unravels the "fable of failure."

46 Letters
Lots of reader reaction to past issues, plus a letter from a Massachusetts education professor, who explains why a new state test may have failed so many prospective teachers.

Get Ready...

. . .To improve reading instruction—and get results.

When Barbara Stadtmiller volunteered four years ago to try new methods of teaching reading with her first graders, she did so with a mix of excitement and trepidation. Today, Stadtmiller is all smiles, as she crows about how well her students are doing.

"I volunteered to be on a districtwide reading assessment committee because I really wanted to see changes for these students," says Stadtmiller, an NEA member who teaches at Tyler Elementary School in Livonia, Michigan.

"There was always a group of kids in my classroom who never got fully involved in the reading process. They sat back and let other kids do the work.

"But now *all* of my students get involved in reading," she continues. "They read more difficult material and take on reading challenges."

Livonia students have indeed become better readers, since the district asked teachers to look for new tools that could ratchet up reading performance.

Across the country, NEA members are taking advantage of a wealth of new research on the best techniques for teaching reading (see page 6). In Livonia, the results have been impressive:

- Almost 90 percent of kindergartners recognize letters, know letter sounds, and understand how a book works.
- The district reports a 30 percent increase in the number of kids performing at high reading levels by the end of first grade.
- And 86 percent of second graders achieved the district benchmark, which requires them to read at beginning third grade levels.

Maureen Castiglione, a fourth grade teacher at Hayes Elementary School, says, "If my students see a word they don't know, they now ask a peer, ask the teacher, or look it up. Before they would just read and blow right by those words, not knowing what they meant. Now they have a system for comprehending what they have read, which adds to their understanding."

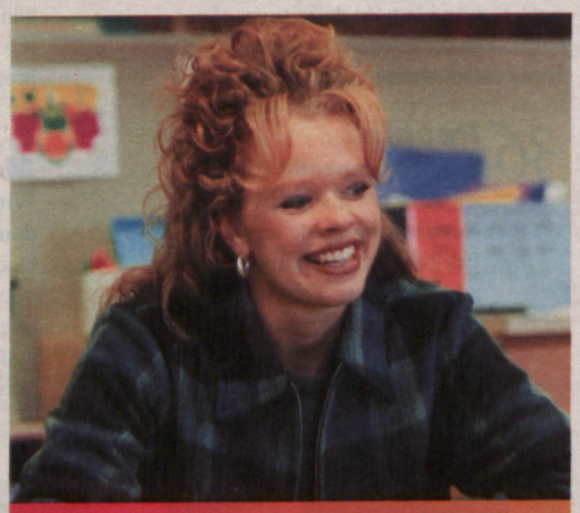
What made the difference?

"We researched the most up-to-date material on reading and borrowed the best practices from different approaches," says Stadtmiller.

Livonia's teachers use a variety of strategies for deciphering letter sounds and words, along with techniques designed to boost comprehension.

For example, Castiglione's fourth graders use a four-step process of metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension. They predict what the story will be about, clarify words as they read, summarize and re-tell the story to demonstrate understanding, and pose questions afterwards.

Kindergarten teachers get the process going by teaching students how a book works, letter recognition, and phonemic awareness. By first and second grade, students are learning how to use cues, including pictures, to decipher meaning. And from second through sixth grade, students learn how to understand expository text.



Teacher Maureen Castiglione is proud of the gains students like Joey Coyne (right) have made in reading.

Photographs by Jennifer Giesey

Another successful strategy involves finding out what students know as early as possible in the school year.

In the past, all first graders began the school year in the same reading group and were assessed as the year progressed, according to Stadtmiller.

"Now," she says, "we assess first graders before school starts in the fall. Then we put them in guided reading groups based on their skill level, so students with higher level reading skills can continue their advanced work, while students who need assistance are identified early on.

"The whole class works on comprehension skills," Stadtmiller continues, "but the small guided reading groups are where students learn to use phonics and decipher pictures."

There's an assessment piece as well. Greg DeNio, a fourth grade teacher at Roosevelt Elementary, is one of several educators helping to design ways of assessing reading comprehension in the fourth grade.

"Before," DeNio says, "we assessed how kids understood vocabulary, but not their level of understanding. Now, students use graphic organizers and questions to re-tell what they've read and to explain their understanding of setting, character, events, themes, problems, and solutions."

Livonia educators hope to repeat this success in the middle and high school grades. Teachers on those levels are now exploring how reading research and assessment strategies can be used to improve reading in the upper grades, says Marlene Bihlmeyer, Livonia's curriculum director.

"Our teachers are making dramatic changes in their classrooms to the benefit of their students," says Karen Zyczynski, president of the Livonia Education Association.

"We've not only set higher standards for our students, but for ourselves as well."

—Karen Gutloff

. . .To get kids excited about reading.

Last March, nearly a million NEA members and 10 million children participated in the nation's largest literacy event ever—NEA's Read Across America.

Read Across America returns this March 2. The goal: to celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday by getting kids excited about reading.

More than just a one-day party, the event's festivities encourage kids to read more year-round. As researchers have shown again and again, the more kids read, the better they'll do.

This year's Read Across America promises to be a bigger, bolder, better kickoff to another year of reading. If you're planning to join in, here are five tried-and-true suggestions for turning up the heat.

Get Your Community Involved

In Manville, New Jersey, educators last year joined more than 1,000 children, parents, and community leaders for a slumber reading party at the town library.

In Seattle, Washington, the mayor, school superintendent, the governor's wife, and Seattle Super Sonics basketball players gathered with teachers at the Paramount Theater, distributed books and cake to thousands of local school children, then joined in a choral reading of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

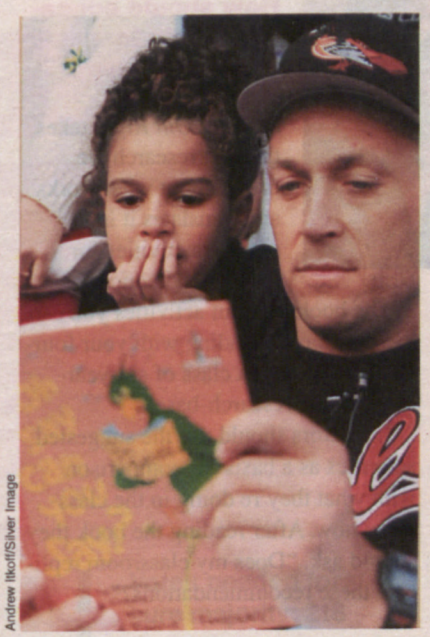
In Cambridge, Massachusetts, teachers took kids to the local firehouse to read with firefighters.

Hold a Contest

The principal of Alexander Elementary school in Jackson, Tennessee, is promising to eat worms if his students earn 7,000 reading points by between January 1 and March 2.

Chris Stansfield

Students in Utah receive a stamped card for every book they read. The cards are redeemed for free soft drinks at local stores. Last year, the students read 30,000 books.


Andrew Itkoff/Silver Image

Invite Celebrities To Join In

Baltimore Orioles baseball player Cal Ripken scored big when he read Dr. Seuss books to dozens of kids during spring training last March in Florida.

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited a Maryland book store to read with students.

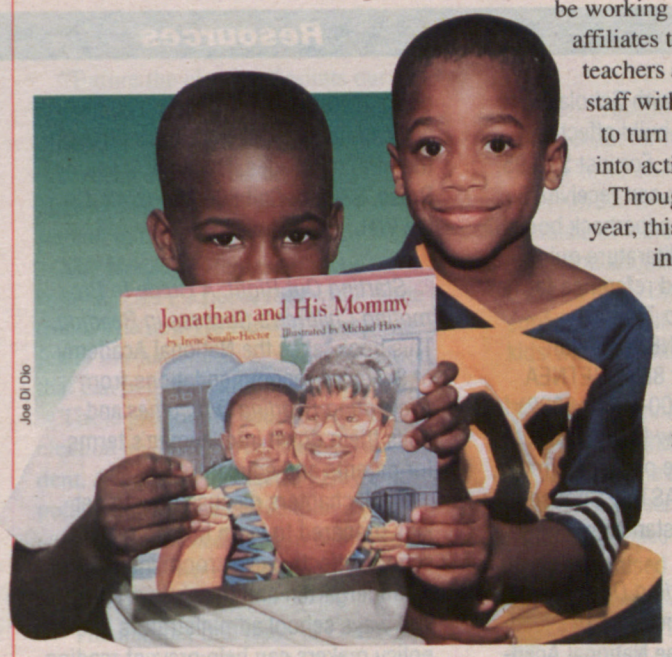
NBC weatherman Al Roker spent time reading with students in Hoboken, New Jersey, while singer Carly Simon delighted preschoolers and adults at the Manhattan Children's Museum in New York City.

Football players from Iowa State University read with thousands of elementary students over the state's fiberoptics network.

Put on a Show

In Paris, Illinois, children and teachers last March dressed as their favorite Seuss characters and paraded around town.

Alexandria, Virginia, students in grades pre-K through three, wore ethnic dress and costumes as they read with foreign embassy representatives at a local shopping mall.



Joe Di Dio

Pair Students With Reading Buddies

High school students in Cherry Creek, Colorado, last year recorded audiotapes of stories for first graders and distributed books to the youngsters.

NEA's Reading Initiative

This year, NEA is taking Read Across America one step further with a high-profile initiative that aims to have every child reading effectively by third grade. (For details, see President's Viewpoint on page 2)

As part of this initiative, NEA will be working with state and local affiliates to provide classroom teachers and school support staff with the tools they need to turn reading research into action.

Throughout the coming year, this activity will include sharing model reading programs and strategies and engaging parents and community partners in school reading efforts.

If your school staff or Association has a model reading program to share, let NEA know. Contact B.J. Yentzer at byentzer@nea.org. Or post your ideas on the *NEA Today* Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday.

Look to future issues of *NEA Today* for more about NEA's reading initiative and Read Across America.

Reading Research Ready To Go

Two new reports from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences offer the latest research on how to turn children into effective readers: Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, *and a companion guide for parents and educators,* Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success.

Scott Suchman

Catherine Snow, professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, chaired the committee that produced the reports. She spoke recently with NEA Today*'s Karen Gutloff about the findings.*

What's the most significant conclusion you've reached?

That preventing reading difficulties starts at birth and is crucial during the preschool years.

We need environments where children have adequate health care, warm and loving parental care. It's important that oral language skills and an enthusiasm for reading are encouraged at home and in preschool. Another preventive method is having excellent reading instruction in school.

We tend to associate reading difficulties with kids from certain kinds of families, as though it's a disease that only certain kids get. It's not a disease. Reading difficulty is a likely part of growing up if kids don't have access to excellent instruction.

How should educators begin to improve reading instruction?

Starting Out Right takes the best research we found about what works and translates it into specific activities for parents and educators.

The book lays out activities you can use to improve reading with your four-year-old or with a class of six-year-olds. It's all research-based.

Educators should use the suggested activities as a basis for comparison with what they're doing in the classroom now. After reading the book they should ask, "Does my classroom replicate these recommendations?"

Should schools of education change the way they train teachers to teach reading?

Yes. Schools of education need to recognize that the breadth of knowledge required to be an effective teacher of reading can't be acquired through one or two courses on reading pedagogy.

Pre-service teachers need courses on linguistics and language structure, and they need to know how to apply what they learn to individual children. We don't expect doctors to practice without understanding the intricacies of organic chemistry. Teachers should be taught how language works.

Is the phonics vs. whole language war over?

I sure hope so. I think people are really sick of the level of controversy about that. We now know what works. The best educators have been just closing their doors and doing what they know needs to be done. They analyze the needs of individual children and tailor their instruction to meet those needs.

Now that we have solid research, what happens next?

I hope schools will use the research to create coherence in how students are taught to read. Too often, one teacher is doing one thing, while a colleague next door has a different approach. Kids need consistency. The reading specialist, ESL teachers, tutor, and teacher's aide need to get in a room together and talk to see how they can use the same methods of enforcing reading skills.

Are kids spending enough time reading?

Having kids read a lot is one of the crucial components of becoming a good reader. Young readers need to become practiced at recognizing letters and sounds. The only way to get good at it is to practice.

The more kids read, the better they'll do at it. That's why NEA's Read Across America program is a great step in the right direction.

Resources

■ NEA has joined with Scholastic to help new teachers build effective classroom libraries. For just $19.95, new NEA members can receive 25 grade-appropriate paperback books, an accompanying literature guide, and the just-revised reference for new faculty, *Learning to Teach.*

For details, call NEA's Fax-on-Demand service at 888/2GETNEA (that's 888—not 800—243-8632) for document 320, New Member Special Offers. To order the package directly, call 1-800/SCHOLASTIC. Choose "prompt 8 for assistance."

■ *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* The country's leading experts from the National Academy of Sciences offer their findings on factors that put children at risk for poor reading. This comprehensive new report discusses effective reading instruction techniques for kids in the preschool and early grades, and offers recommendations on how literacy can be fostered from birth through the primary grades. National Academy Press, $39.95. Call 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu.

■ *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Success in Reading.* This book takes the National Academy of Sciences recommendations from *Preventing Reading Difficulties* and boils them down into layman's terms for parents and educators.

Book chapters discuss how to get kids prepared to learn how to read in school, effective classroom instruction in kindergarten and the early grades, and ways school administrators and policy makers can help prevent reading difficulties in young children.

National Academy Press, $14.95. Call 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu.

■ *Every Child Reading: An Action Plan* is a booklet published by the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of 12 of the country's leading education organizations, including NEA.

The booklet outlines practices educators, policy makers, and others should adopt to fall in line with research on how to teach reading effectively. For copies, contact Lydia Ellis at the American Federation of Teachers, 202/393-5684. On the Web: www.learningfirst.org.

■ The American Library Association Web site—www.ala.org—offers tips on how librarians and parents can encourage teenagers to read.

■ The International Reading Association offers educators a wealth of information on reading and literacy—from books to conferences. Contact IRA at 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE, 19714-8139. On the Web: www.reading.org.

Checklist

The Cat Is Back!

Read Across America returns March 2, 1999. To get every child in every school in every community to celebrate reading in honor of Dr. Seuss's 95th birthday:

☐ Call your NEA local affiliate. See what's being planned, and, if nothing's in the works, gather some colleagues, brainstorm, and make something happen.

☐ Get to the Read Across America Web site: www.nea.org/readacross. Check highlights from celebrations around the country last year to get great ideas for this year.

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☐ Re-read page 5 for good ideas about Read Across America activities you can try in your community. Think about posting that page on your school's bulletin board to inspire your colleagues.

☐ Engage partners. The PTA, American Library Association, Boys & Girls Clubs, bookstores, newspapers, local reading councils, and many, many other groups are eager to participate.

☐ Sign the Read Across America pledge at www.nea.org/readacross and describe what you'll be doing.

☐ To get more information, visit www.nea.org/readacross. Call NEA's Fax-on-Demand service at 888/2GETNEA. Or call 202/822-SEUS.

NEA Today Newsmakers

In the Nation

Beyond 100,000 New Teachers

Voters have sent a message. Will the new Congress listen?

Imagine you were a member of Congress. It's a few weeks before Election Day. You want to show voters you share their concerns. What do you do?

You, of course, cast a vote to help improve America's public schools.

That's just what the real members of Congress did this past October. With Election Day approaching, Congress enacted a budget that will help reduce class sizes in grades K-3 by making a down payment to help school districts begin to hire 100,000 new teachers.

This victory for smaller class size may be the most dramatic sign yet that no issue is now more important to American voters than improving public education.

But improving schools is going to take more than federal help for hiring new teachers, as NEA President Bob Chase pointed out before Congress recessed for last November's election.

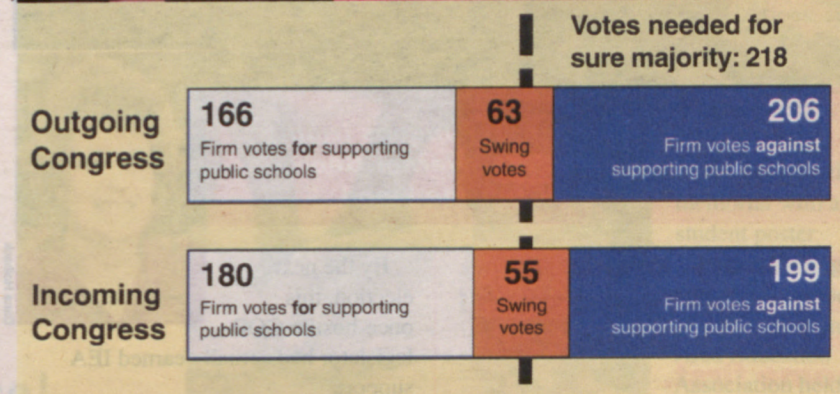
"There just aren't 100,000 empty classrooms in America's schools," said Chase. "States aren't in any position to foot the $200 billion bill it's going to cost to give us the school buildings our kids need. States need federal assistance, and they need it now."

Will that assistance be forthcoming from the new Congress that takes office this January?

The House of Representatives: An Election Day Before and After

Joe Di Dio

Tamara White, a grad student at Cal State Sacramento, is looking forward to becoming one of the 100,000 new teachers that federal aid dollars will soon help hire. Will the new Congress help pay for the classrooms these new teachers will need? That depends—on whether swing lawmakers in Congress get off the fence and start supporting public schools.



Source: NEA Government Relations analysis

Mary Elizabeth Teasley, NEA's government relations director, is hopeful.

"Election '98," she explains, "was a significant victory for children and public education."

How significant?

In elections for the U.S. Senate, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans picked up any new seats—but education did.

"Before the election," points out NEA staff political analyst Jack Pacheco, "we had 50 members of the Senate voting consistently against children and education. Now 48 remain in that category."

The House of Representatives results, adds Pacheco, follow the same trend. The new House will sport seven fewer die-hard votes against legislation that can help kids and public schools.

These pro-public education results, election analysts agree, were no accident. According to Election Day exit polls, voters tabbed education as the issue that mattered most in determining how they would vote in their congressional election.

"The number one issue of concern to voters nationwide," concluded political analyst William Schneider of the American Enterprise Institute, "was education."

"In the 106th Congress," says NEA's Teasley, "we'll work hard to make sure lawmakers remember that."

Making a Difference, Independently

Americans elected 435 candidates to the House of Representatives in November, but only 98 of them ran in races that were realistically up for grabs.

In 11 of these close races, the stakes for children and public education couldn't have been higher. In these 11 contests, a strong supporter of kids and public schools was facing an equally strong candidate opposed to supporting public education.

These 11 close races could have gone either way. But, in the end, they all went the right way—and the pro-public schools candidate won—in large part thanks to an imaginative series of NEA "independent expenditure" campaigns.

Through these campaigns, political action dollars voluntarily contributed by NEA members around the country financed TV, radio, and direct mail messages that helped voters understand the stark differences between the competing candidates on education.

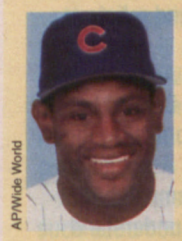
These messages were just part of the pro-public education campaign work made possible by the $6 million NEA members contributed to the NEA political action committee, NEA-PAC, for the 1998 federal elections.

This month, the NEA political action committee will be gearing up for the year 2000 with a new name, the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

"This new name more accurately reflects the focus of our political action efforts," notes NEA President Bob Chase. Watch future issues of *NEA Today* for more details.

Heroes & Zeroes

Truly a man for all seasons, Sammy Sosa breaks records in the baseball season, then turns his attention to the hurricane season. When Georges left 100,000 in the Dominican Republic homeless, Sosa set up a foundation to aid the relief effort and flew down to help. Folks in Sosa's hometown of San Pedro lined roadsides "barefooted in the mud" just to get a glimpse.



AP/Wide World

Nature or nurture? We'll never know if kids start watching Fox Family Channels' two newest creations—the Boyz Channel and the Girlz Channel—guaranteed to thrill toy manufacturers by playing into the crudest stereotypes of both sexes. Time for parents to grab the clicker and keep the big, bad Fox away.

Massachusetts teacher Paul Tiernan made a big splash recently by introducing a bill that would require all elected state officials to take a Public Leadership Competency Test. Enough teacher "competency tests" and the teacher bashing that goes with them, Tiernan says. "They should be able to take in what they dish out."

Midway Games, Inc., struck a sour note recently when it aired a commercial for its video game NFL Blitz. The ad showed pro quarterback Kordell Steward throwing footballs at marching band musicians and knocking them down, one at a time. Did some ad genius confuse football with bowling and kids with the pins?

Virginia middle school teacher Catherine Ransome's got her students—and her wheels—in line. By skating 38 miles on in-line skates, Ransome raised $2,550 for the Leukemia Society. The entire event, covering 86 miles from Athens, Georgia, to Atlanta last fall, raised $285,000 in just one day.

At the Ballot Box

No to Tuition Tax Credits

State ballots in November were filled with initiatives that impact education, but no question on any ballot may have had more national significance than a tuition tax credit measure in Colorado.

If enacted, the measure would have given parents up to $2,500 a year in tax credits to send their children to private and religious schools.

But the measure, Amendment 17, wasn't enacted. Backed by financial support from NEA, the Colorado Education Association waged a massive campaign that helped state voters understand how tuition tax credits would undermine public education.

The defeat of Amendment 17—by a 59-41 margin—marks the fifth rejection of a statewide initiative to provide public tax dollars to private schools since 1992.

An Initiative Round-Up

The Colorado vote against tuition tax credits turned out to be just one of nine initiative and referendum victories scored by NEA members in November.

On the West Coast, the California Teachers Association successfully supported a $9.2 billion bond measure for school construction and repair and defeated an initiative that would have created an unaccountable school bureaucracy and cost public schools tens of millions of dollars each year.

In Oregon, voters turned back a "paycheck protection" initiative. The measure, opposed by the Oregon Education Association, aimed to prohibit payroll deduction for any organization that used any of the deducted funds for political purposes.

A similar initiative was defeated in California last June. Behind both measures were groups pushing tax subsidies for private education.

In Nebraska, voters soundly rejected a measure that would have limited the amount of money state and local governments could raise through taxes.

Building the Education Party

AP/Wide World

NEA members like Lou Ann Jacobs (right) helped elect Republican Governor George Ryan and Lt. Governor Corrine Wood.

Dana Holback

In Illinois, children and public education, not party labels, come first.

Dan Burkhalter, the top government relations staffer at the Illinois Education Association, likes to tell the story of IEA's once stormy relationship with a Republican state senate leader from downstate.

This powerful senator regularly railed against teacher tenure protections and charged that IEA was blocking needed school change.

"We tried unsuccessfully to defeat him two or three times in elections," says Burkhalter. "He hated us."

Stymied, IEA decided to see if educators could change the mind of this rancorous foe.

"We contacted some IEA members who were his buddies, and they talked to him," says Burkhalter. "He found that his friends were saying the same things as IEA's lobbyists —and he started to listen."

By the next election, this once-hostile GOP legislator had actually earned IEA support.

"Now he's virtually an advocate for us," says Burkhalter. "He tells other legislators that their attack on tenure won't improve reading scores one bit."

Stories like this aren't all that unusual in Illinois, where NEA members are working hard to look past party labels.

"Bipartisanship, it's the way we have to go," says Lou Ann Jacobs, a Pontiac High School educator in central Illinois. "You just can't tie yourself to one party anymore."

In the 1998 elections, NEA affiliates across the nation actively sought out and supported candidates from both major parties who support public education. In Illinois, this bipartisan stance has become second nature.

"We don't care if a candidate is a Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, or Vegetarian," Bob Haisman, the president of the Illinois Education Association, points out. "What we care about is education."

In the 1998 elections, this IEA commitment to building bridges to both parties was sorely tested. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate seemed a natural, at first glance, for IEA support. A member of Congress and a former teacher, the candidate sported a fine pro-public education voting record.

But IEA ended up recommending support for the candidate's Republican opponent, George Ryan, the Illinois secretary of state.

Lou Ann Jacobs, a teacher since 1972, was one of the IEA members who helped make that decision. She serves on her NEA state affiliate's political action committee.

"We listened to all the candidates talk about their education programs and then discussed our past experiences with them," says Jacobs. "We came to a decision to recommend George Ryan to our membership."

Ryan, Jacobs explains, had pledged his support for significant elements of IEA's ambitious program to improve Illinois schools. He'd also demonstrated the ability to move complex issues through the state legislature, where bipartisanship is the key to getting things done.

The IEA-supported Ryan won the gubernatorial race in November, and he'll enter office this January facing a diverse group of Republican and Democratic lawmakers also elected with IEA backing.

"We're not worried about which party leads the state legislature," adds Burkhalter, the IEA lobbyist. "We want a working majority of education advocates in each chamber."

NEA members in Illinois feel they now have that working majority—and a friendly governor to boot. Next on the agenda: equitable school funding.

For More Information

For details on the Illinois Education Association's bipartisan strategy, contact IEA government relations staffer Dan Burkhalter at 217/544-0706. Fax: 207/544-7383.

The Bottom Line

Choosing a college: News magazines regularly publish rankings of the nation's colleges, but only 18 percent of high school seniors say these rankings influence their college choice. The most influential source of college info: college course catalogs.

Teen sex: More than half of the nation's teenage boys, 51 percent, have never had sexual intercourse, according to new statistics from the federal Centers for Disease Control. In 1991, only 43 percent of teen boys had never had intercourse.

Teen protest: Massive rallies and strikes by French students last October have led to a $730 million increase in funding for the nation's high schools. Hundreds of thousands of French teens took to the streets in October demanding smaller classes.

Vouchers: Support for school vouchers may have peaked among Black Americans. Last year, 57 percent of Black adults supported tax subsidies for private tuition. The new total from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies polling: 48 percent.

In the States

More Than a Matter of Pennies

Pennsylvania NEA members, veterans find common cause in education.

"A lot of kids today," notes Cynthia Meyer, a junior high computer teacher in Pennsylvania, "look on an armed services career as a neat thing to do."

These students, says Meyer, "want to serve their country, but they go into the armed forces with no concept of war."

Sacrifice, carnage, courage, confusion, honor—the stuff of war—aren't easy to fold into lesson plans, but there soon may be a better way.

Pennsylvania State Education Association members like Meyer are working with students and veterans to raise money for a planned Korea/Vietnam memorial that will serve as a national education center.

"The memorial will center on the need to avoid conflict, not glorify it," says Bob Wolfe, a former auto mechanics instructor who's now the president of the memorial project.

"By accepting the past as lessons of what to do and what not to do," says Wolfe, "we may justify in some way the losses suffered in conflict."

To be located on eight acres in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the memorial has some impressive backing, ranging from a congressional resolution to a checkoff on Pennsylvania state income tax returns. But the memorial has a long way to go to reach its $5 million fundraising goal.

Hardly a matter of pennies, you might say, but don't tell that to NEA members in eastern Pennsylvania.

PSEA's 14,000-member Eastern Region recently piloted a Penny Power for Veterans project in 12 schools.

The effort raised $10,000 for the Korea/Vietnam memorial from the spare change of K-12 students—and, in the process, helped forge stronger connections between veterans and public education.

"PSEA is encouraging locals to start projects to support the memorial and to build coalitions with veteran organizations," notes PSEA Eastern Region President George Treisner, who teaches electrical construction at the Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School.

Last July, on the floor of NEA's 1998 Representative Assembly, Treisner urged his Association colleagues to take the Penny Power project national.

"Every veterans organization has endorsed this program and would be happy to help you in your schools," he told RA delegates. "In these days, when public education is being attacked from all over, it would be a great idea to build such coalitions in our schools."

Such a coalition has already been forged in districts like Allentown, where Ritter School teachers and students collaborated with memorial organizers George Duell and Bob Wolfe—both veterans and long-time PSEA members—to pioneer the Penny Power project.

PSEA members in other districts—like Lehighton, Panther Valley, and East Penn—have been following suit, inviting memorial organizers to speak in their schools and working with veterans, parent organizations, and local businesses.

At Bethlehem Area Vo-Tech, NEA members raised cash for the memorial with a student poster contest honoring veterans. Members of the Palmerton Area Education Association held a coin-collecting contest that netted pizza parties for the winners.

"A lot of students have relatives who are vets," says Cynthia Meyer, who teaches at Palmerton Junior High. "They like the idea that they can tell their kids they gave toward this."

John Sacoges

Computer teacher Cynthia Meyer and two of her students, Ryan McGrath and Jennifer Conroy, point to the pennies they've collected for a war memorial. Behind them are veterans Steve Vlossak, Hannah Strohl, and Joseph Plechary.

For More Information

If you're interested in raising funds for the Korea/Vietnam memorial, visit the KVM Web site at www.silo.com/kvm. To donate directly, send a check to The Korea/Vietnam Memorial, Inc., P.O. Box 416, Bethlehem, PA 18016-0416. Mark "NEA Project" somewhere on the check.

Education Minnesota

Education Minnesota was born this fall when the 42,000-member Minnesota Education Association and the 20,000-member Minnesota Federation of Teachers merged.

In October, the NEA Board of Directors voted 141-25 to approve guidelines to provide for NEA affiliation of the new organization.

Next July, the NEA Representative Assembly will be asked to consider permanent guidelines for affiliating state affiliate mergers. Education Minnesota will be subject to those guidelines.

The Minnesota merger is the first such action on the state level. Several NEA and AFT local affiliates have merged in past years.

Education Minnesota members will belong to both NEA and the AFT.

Court Allows Vouchers

In November, the Supreme Court announced it would not review a decision by the Wisconsin Supreme Court that allows public tax dollars to be used for vouchers for private religious schools.

NEA President Bob Chase called the decision "disappointing. Every day, the voucher plan does more damage to the Milwaukee Public Schools," he said, "and the city's taxpayers are paying the tab."

The voucher program has already stripped the Milwaukee schools of $25 million in state aid.

NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin, lead counsel in the case, warned against jumping to conclusions about the Court's motives.

"There are many reasons why the Supreme Court might choose not to review a particular case," Chanin said. "Whatever the Court's reason in this instance, it's important to note that it does not reflect agreement or disagreement with the Wisconsin ruling, nor does it have any precedential impact outside of Wisconsin."

NEA will continue to oppose efforts to use public funds for religious schools, on the grounds that they violate the Constitution's separation of church and state.

Higher achievement: Students in 14 states are now performing at "world class" levels in math and science, concludes a report released by the National Education Goals Panel. For details, check www.negp.gov/reports/goal3_98.htm.

Guns and kids: Is gun control legislation helping reduce violent death rates? Could be. Gunfire killed 4,643 American children in 1996, the lowest total since 1989. In the 1990s, says the Children's Defense Fund, some 37,000 children have been killed by firearms.

Teens at work: The injury rate for working teens is down 20 percent since 1992, but 210,000 youngsters are still injured on the job each year. The Labor Department recently fined Kmart for letting underage workers operate hazardous equipment at three stores.

Classroom video: Almost two-thirds of the nation's teachers incorporate PBS programs into their lessons, according to a Cable in the Classroom survey. A new PBS Web site at www.pbs.org/teachersource highlights available lesson plans.

On Your Side

NEA Activist Reinstated

An NEA local affiliate president in Pennsylvania, who was fired for her activism on behalf of quality education, has won her job back with help from her Association.

Margie McNie, a 28-year librarian and president of the New Brighton Education Association, was fired two years ago for her whistle-blowing on improprieties in programs and criticism of the overall operation of the school system.

McNie won an arbitration filed by her local and state Associations, then was reinstated by a 6-2 vote of the school board.

"It's been a long battle," McNie says. "I'm glad it's over. And I hope no one ever has to go through anything like this again."

Vindication in Nebraska

Despite excellent evaluations, Nebraska teacher Julie Downing received notice last year that the school board was considering firing her.

"I did the only thing I know how to do," notes Downing. "I said a quick prayer and dialed the 800 number for NSEA."

The Nebraska State Education Association convinced the Dawes County school board it was making a mistake. Downing now is doing what she loves—teaching K-2 students.

"We won," Downing writes, "and success is being felt by a satisfied, vindicated, and employed teacher, a community with a renewed interest in their school, and many other local teachers who realize the strength and expertise NSEA provides."

Custodians' Jobs on Line

Last year, contract custodians were hired to staff a new middle school in Montgomery Township, New Jersey.

This year, an all-out Association and community effort to save *high* school custodians' jobs from privatization has succeeded—so far.

Pressured by demonstrations, letters, leaflets, and media outreach, board members renewed the high school custodians' contracts, but included a clause that permits firing with 30 days' notice.

Big Fight in a Small Town

Jeff Green

Six of the 13 members of the Organized Classified Association of Oroville, Washington, from left to right: Jessie Rise, Jane Lynch, Tom Teas, Ron Hyde, and Randy Bell. Inset, local Association President John Marts.

Out goes the good boss. In comes your worst nightmare. What do you do?

John Marts and the dozen other bus drivers and custodians he works with in Oroville, Washington—a small town just four miles from the Canadian border—were accustomed to a pleasant working relationship with their boss, the school superintendent.

Then, after 18 years on the job, he retired. "We went from a good superintendent to a person who was at the total opposite end of the spectrum," explains Marts.

A self-described "union-buster," the new superintendent set out to take away school employees' rights and privileges.

"He made it clear," Marts says, "it was his way or the highway."

So, three years ago, the 13 employees got together and voted unanimously to become the Organized Classified Association of Oroville, an affiliate of the Washington Education Association and NEA. Marts was elected local president.

Bargaining a first contract was an all too typical ordeal. A recent study from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service reports that only about 25 percent of private-sector unions certified in 1996 were able to negotiate a first contract within a year.

In Oroville, there were delays and hot tempers. Management put proposals on the table to reduce drivers' salaries, gut seniority rights, and make them work 20 years before getting to the last step on the pay scale.

"It got pretty ugly, and we weren't getting very far," recalls Marts.

Association members requested a mediator, filed unfair labor practice charges, and even took a strike vote. And they got busy, talking to folks around town and to local reporters.

In the midst of the negotiations, Marts and another custodian—the union's chief negotiator—received unsatisfactory job evaluations. Both had received satisfactory job reviews for years prior to union involvement.

"I told him I didn't feel it was right," Marts says, "and I wouldn't accept it." Minutes later, Marks was on the phone to his union.

The local and state Associations immediately filed charges with the state's Public Employment Relations Commission, accusing the district of retaliating against union leaders.

"The superintendent said the evaluation was the beginning of due process," Marts says, "the first step in having me fired. If I wasn't a member of a union, I would probably have lost my job."

With legal help from the Washington Education Association, Marts was vindicated last fall. The state commission found Oroville officials guilty and ordered the district to withdraw the negative evaluation, admit publicly that they had broken the law, and promise in writing to no longer violate their employees' labor rights.

"I feel very fortunate that WEA and the UniServ office backed me the way they did," Marts says. "We're a very small local, 250 miles from Seattle. Our union put a lot of effort into representing us, and we appreciate it."

The Oroville local will be heading into bargaining again this spring, but Marts expects things to be different.

"We have a contract now. We have a grievance procedure. We have backing if we need it," he says. "Now we're getting ready for fine-tuning."

In the meantime, the union-busting superintendent left the district and was replaced with a new one NEA members feel more comfortable with.

"We have monthly meetings, and there's trust on both sides," says Marts. "And now that I'm a union member, I go into the superintendent's office as an equal."

For More Information

Contact UniServ rep Lora Hein at 509/886-0870. Or call Association President John Marts at home, 509/476-3891.

The Bottom Line

Computers: Public schools now average one computer per every six students, reports a new study by Market Data Retrieval. That's half the 1:12 ratio from just five years ago. About half of the nation's school computers sit in classrooms.

Testing principals: A new exam for licensing principals, the nation's first ever, is now in place. Each of the initial four states to adopt the test—Maryland, North Carolina, Missouri, and Mississippi—will determine its own passing score.

Diversity on campus: A sizeable majority of Americans, 66 percent, want the nation's colleges to build more diverse student bodies. A more modest majority, 55 percent, want students to be required to study different cultures, according to Ford Foundation pollsters.

Sugar water: The Center for Science in the Public Interest, the group that exposed high-fat movie popcorn, has launched a campaign to ban the sale of sodas in schools. Soft drinks, notes the group, make up to 40 percent of some children's daily calories.

At the Local Level

Harnessing People Power

NEA local affiliates depend on volunteers. In Georgia, one local makes a science of it.

With no state collective bargaining law, no full-time staff, and competition from other educator groups hawking cheap dues and cheaper liability insurance, the Organization of DeKalb Educators has a tough row to hoe.

And yet, this NEA local affiliate in metro Atlanta adds 30 new members a week, maintains a strong voice with the administration, and has helped elect powerful allies in the state legislature.

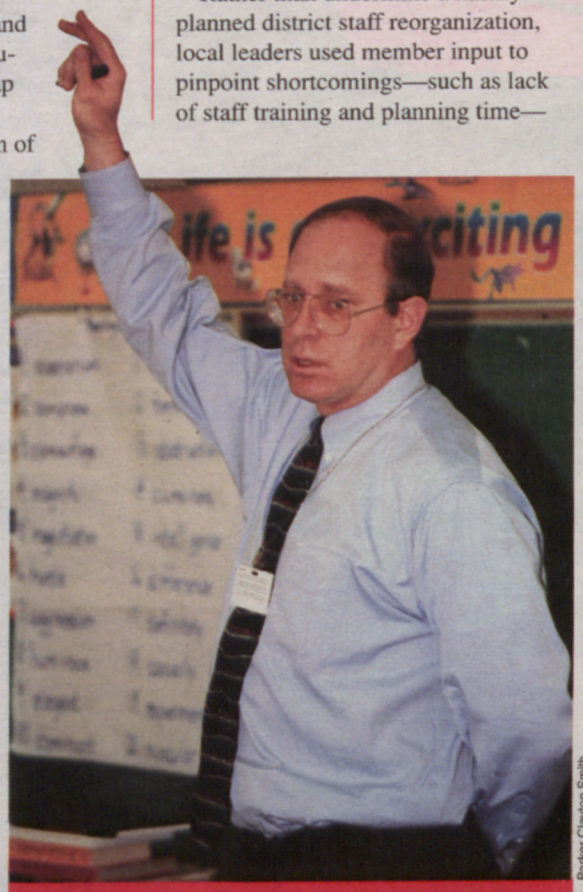
The local is using its growing strength to push for safer, cleaner, and more modern schools—while working for more parental involvement, smaller class sizes, and better use of paraprofessionals in the classroom.

In other words, the 1,150-member Organization of DeKalb Educators is thriving. ODE is moving ahead by:

■ **Using devoted member volunteers.** On his own time, music teacher Richard Kale cranks out mailing labels and updates the membership database of this fast-growing local.

That devotion is shared by volunteers like Helen Zappia, a retiree who serves as local treasurer, and former ODE presidents like Jackie Henry and Rosalind Taylor, who stay active as chairs of key local committees.

"Through our commitment and belief in being members of NEA," says ODE President David Schutten, "we've accomplished a lot of things that other organizations don't do."



Parker Clayton Smith

The Organization of DeKalb Educators signs up 30 new members a week, says Georgia elementary teacher and local President David Schutten.

■ **Speaking loudly for members.** ODE leaders address at least nine school board meetings a year, on issues like textbook selection and promotions. "And this Association doesn't *gripe*," says UniServ Director Elsie Jones. "It identifies possible alternatives."

Rather than undermine a hastily planned district staff reorganization, local leaders used member input to pinpoint shortcomings—such as lack of staff training and planning time—and worked with administrators to first iron out the kinks at pilot sites.

■ **Dealing with top administrators as equals.** Meetings between local leaders and administrators are normally cordial and productive, be they monthly 7 a.m. chats with the superintendent or sessions with his deputy to resolve problems at specific sites.

"We work pretty much as partners," says Schutten. "There are a lot of things we get done just with phone calls. When I made a late evening call to get more police officers at a high school, the deputy superintendent got back to me in 30 minutes and pledged an extra police presence the next day."

■ **Making politics work for staff and students alike.** Through grassroots political action, ODE members have helped elect valuable allies in the Georgia legislature—who in turn lobby DeKalb County school board members and administrators when school employees need a hand.

This partnership paid off in 1997, when legislators' calls and letters to district decision makers helped win DeKalb educators an extra 1 percent on *top* of a 3 percent raise already approved by the school board.

In the same year, Association members joined forces with school board members and community leaders to successfully campaign for a one-cent "local option" sales tax for school construction and renovation. "That money is now being spent," reports Elsie Jones, "for everything from new building additions to the renovation of Decatur city schools."

■ **Harnessing member enthusiasm.** ODE not only brings in 30 new members a week, it *organizes* them. A cadre of activists from the district's 123 worksites "identifies people who want to be involved," says Jones, "and finds out what they need and how they want to go about getting it."

At cadre meetings, she adds, "People compare membership percentages at schools, hear what other people are doing, and just get energized by the exciting things happening out there."

■ **Digging in for the long haul.** "You have to be committed for the long run to make this work," stresses David Schutten, "because you sacrifice a lot in your personal life to get so much accomplished."

For More Information

Send a Fax to David Schutten, president of the Organization of DeKalb Educators, at 404/892-5686 or send E-mail to NEA Director Jackie Henry at Bee410@aol.com.

Stories and Self-Esteem

Students are learning to tell some pretty tall stories, courtesy of Georgia's Organization of DeKalb Educators. In 1995, the NEA affiliate gave $250 in start-up money for a storytelling project, which has since evolved into the annual PeachSeed Storytelling Festival and Conference for Young Tellers.

Local President David Schutten, a teacher at Rowland Elementary, reports that last year's festival drew 225 children from 40 schools.

"Storytelling helps kids express themselves orally, gets them to read more, and enhances self-esteem," says Schutten, a professional storyteller. "It has really turned some kids around."

Voucher Scheme Illegal

NEA members in Pennsylvania's Southeast Delco school district are breathing a little easier, thanks to a judge's decision striking down the school board's plan to issue tuition vouchers for private and religious schools.

David Gondak, president of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, says the board will likely appeal this ruling, "but nonetheless it sends a strong message that Pennsylvania school boards do not have legal authority to use tax funds for vouchers."

Bargaining Victory

Following 28 months of bargaining and a contract imposition, the 750-member Middletown (New Jersey) Township Education Association struck for four days at the start of the school year.

With strong support—from other local affiliates, non-tenured teachers, and even unorganized aides—MTEA members succeeding in having the imposed settlement, which had been in place for three months, replaced with a negotiated contract.

"Now we will move forward to ensure that this Association never faces such acrimonious bargaining again," pledges MTEA President Diane Swaim.

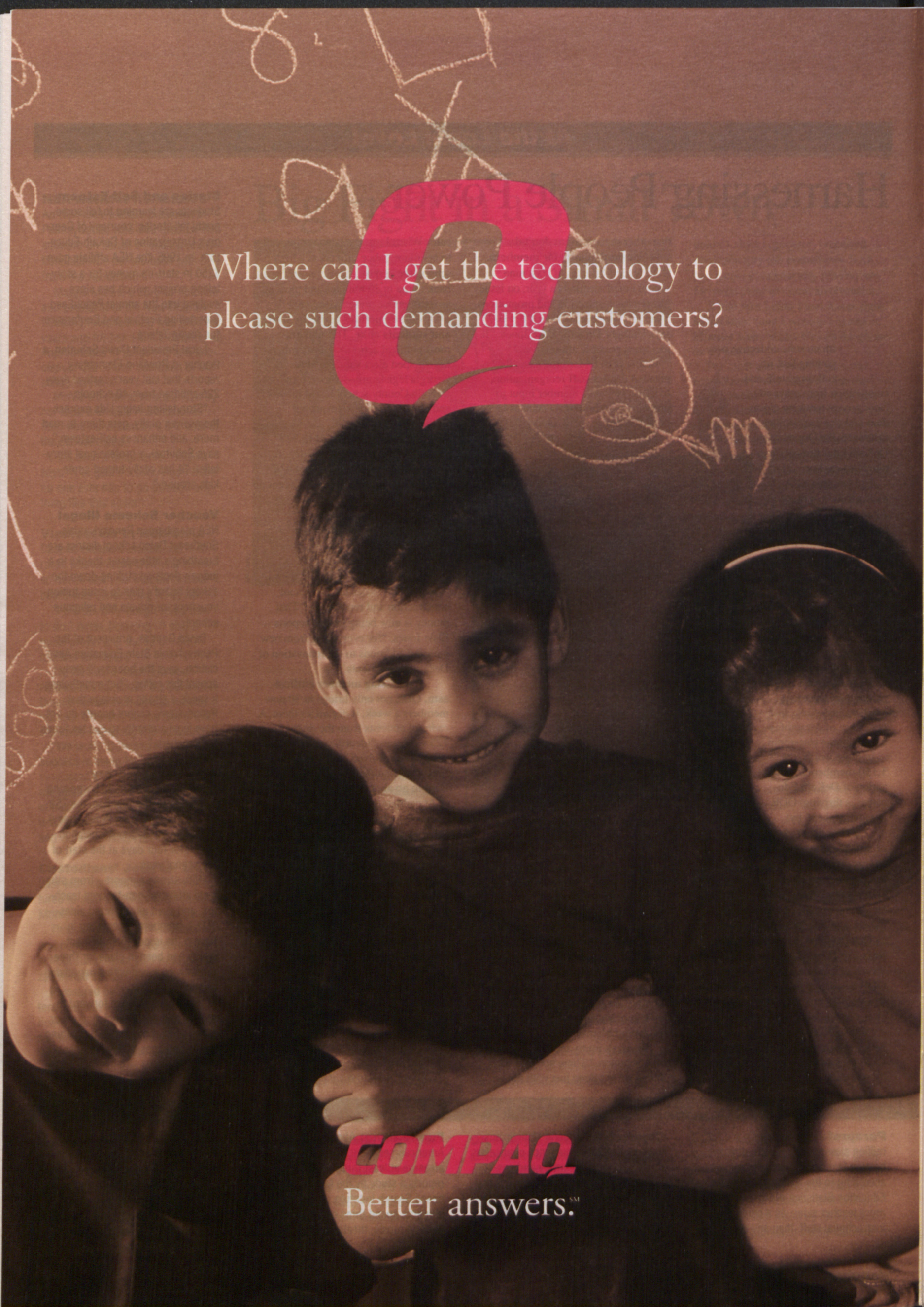
Paraprofessionals: Over a half million classroom aides are directly helping teachers provide instruction, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. North Carolina has more teacher aides, as a percentage of instructional staff, than any other state.

Counseling: Federal statisticians now count 89,000 guidance counselors in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. That total, reports the U.S. Department of Education, "translates to about 513 students for every guidance counselor."

Fun reading: About a quarter of American secondary students read for pleasure at least three hours a week, reports a study by the Minneapolis-based Search Institute. About a fifth of students spend three or more hours a week in music, theater, or other arts.

Tube time: Children ages six to eight spend over 12 hours a week watching TV, six times as many hours as they spend studying. These same kids spend four minutes a week on hobbies, says the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research.

Where can I get the technology to please such demanding customers?



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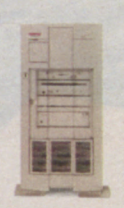

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Q. What is the number one cause of student absenteeism?

A. Asthma.

Good health is vital to effective teaching and learning. The NEA Health Information Network exists to provide you with resources, materials, training, and technical assistance on health topics related to you and to your students.

To request a listing of materials or programs, call 1-800-718-8387 or visit our website at www.nea.org/hin.

NEA HIN

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
HEALTH INFORMATION NETWORK

Health and Education Make the Connection

Students are reading—and experiencing the joy of learning in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, where formerly low-performing elementary schools turn out high-grade students with a program called Success for All. ***See page 19.***

John Heller

Innovators

Finding a Way To Reconnect Youth

Innovator:
Leona Eggert

Job:
Professor of psychosocial and community health, University of Washington School of Nursing, Seattle

Bright Idea:
Eggert has created a successful program—Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills—to help high-risk youth improve school performance, manage their anger, and decrease their drug use, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Piloted for five years with more than 600 public high school students, Reconnecting Youth has now been adopted by more than 1,400 schools, clinics, mental health centers, detention centers, and private practices.

"This program is grounded in the notion that if you provide kids with a supportive environment and teach them life skills, they'll have a much greater likelihood of success as adults," says Eggert.

The semester-long program uses a positive peer group culture to get students to see the need to change their behavior. An adult facilitator uses a leader's guide with 80 sequential lessons.

Participants meet daily for 55 minutes as part of the regular high school curriculum. They offer each other support, a place to problem-solve and learn personal control, communication skills, and decision-making.

A second semester is optional. A year-long program will soon be tested with students and their parents.

Impact:
Groups using Reconnecting Youth have documented a 60 percent drop in hard drug use, a 20 percent increase in grade point averages, and better personal control, including anger management. It's been ranked a top-tier program by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

For More:
Reconnecting Youth ($139) is available through the National Education Service, 800/733-6786 or on the Web at www.nes.org. Send E-mail to Eggert at eggert@ u.washington.edu.

Ellen Banner

Striking at Vouchers

"The Voucher Myth," *by Sadanand Dhume,* A. Magazine: Inside Asian America, *October/November 1998.*

"Vouchers strike at the heart of public education. Their proponents argue that vouchers are about choice. [But] the right to choose a private school already exists. The argument here is whether the government ought to subsidize that choice.

School vouchers erode the sense of social cohesion provided by an extensive public school education system.

Middle-class flight will only ensure that a public education becomes synonymous with a shoddy education. The acceptance of such a philosophy effectively kills the uniquely American idea that anyone with the right amount of perseverance and brains can overcome the inequalities at birth.

The choice, then, is not between parental control and governmental control. It is a question of preserving a system that offers a child from an ordinary background the chance to get the same higher education, and with it the same life chances, as a child born to wealth." 99

Saluting Real Heroes

Innovator:
Ann Medlock

Job:
President and founder, The Giraffe Project, Langley, Washington

Bright Idea:
Medlock created the Giraffe Project to spread the word about real heroes and help students find them in their communities.

"Most kids think heroes are rich, talented, gorgeous, or bulletproof," says Medlock. "We define a hero as someone who sticks his or her neck out for the common good.

"A hero is someone who takes a risk—a kid who bucks peer pressure to do something good is a hero. We also include adults who take risks."

Begun in 1982 as a media project to place positive stories in newspapers and magazines, Medlock amassed a story bank of more than 900 files on real heroes.

Teachers started adapting the stories in their classrooms and asked Medlock, a former curriculum developer at Macmillan and SRA, to create materials directly tailored for schools.

For the past seven years, the Giraffe Project has focused on developing its character education curriculum. Each level—K-2, grades 3-5, 6-9, 10-12—has 30 hero stories, plus lesson plans, video, and audio tapes.

First students read about heroes. Then they're asked to go out and find heroes in their community. "That jumps the schoolyard wall," says Medlock, noting that local heroes are often invited to address assemblies.

Next, students start looking for something in their community that needs fixing and select a service project—like cleaning up a local park.

"It's very student generated," said Medlock, "When the idea comes from students, you can't stop them. It's about becoming more aware—students begin to look at each other that way and become more concerned for one another."

The Giraffe Project currently has a staff of seven, plus eight teacher trainers located throughout the country.

Impact:
"The curriculum underlies everything the children do the rest of the year," reports one third grade teacher, "because it changes them into a community of learners."

For more:
Contact the Giraffe Project at P.O. Box 759, Langley, WA 98260, 360/221-7989. Send E-mail to medlock@giraffe.org or visit the Web at www.giraffe.org/giraffe.

Ellen Banner

When Myths Merit A Closer Look

Study hard, and you get ahead—right? Not so, at least for Latino and African-American students who may want to enter careers in math and science, says Alberto Rodriguez, professor of science education at New Mexico State University. He's analyzed reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and others, looking at the top students by ethnic group, and has found reason to suspect a "myth of meritocracy" in education.

Nicole Dedekian

What findings did your research turn up?

I took the scores for the top 10 percent of females in the 1995 math portion of the SAT and looked at each by ethnic group.

The top 10 percent of Puerto Rican women averaged only 6 points above the national mean. The top 10 percent of African-American women averaged 14 points below the national mean.

By comparison, the top 10 percent of Anglo-European women scored 98 points above the national mean, and Asian Americans averaged 130 points above the mean.

When I looked at Advanced Placement examinations, I found that only 4 percent of those students who successfully complete AP course in the sciences are Latino, African American, and Native American, even though these ethnic groups represent more than one-third of the American population.

How does this point to a myth of meritocracy?

You'd expect that many of the social and institutional factors that negatively affect minority students' performance would not have the same effect on these college-bound minority students. And according to the meritocracy myth, these students' hard work should have paid off.

But the gaps in achievement were still there.

What do we do from here?

We can't deny these gaps. We need to ask how to close them. And we need to ask ourselves how far does working hard really get minority students who are interested in pursuing college careers.

We must increase opportunities for students to feel connected. We must be more attentive to students so we can use their prior knowledge.

We need more socially relevant curriculums, and we need to make science more multicultural. When we discuss the nature of science, teachers need to realize that western science is one way of making sense of the world, but it may not be the only way.

Send E-mail to Rodriguez at albertor@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu. His research is published in "Busting Open the Meritocracy Myth: Rethinking Equity and Student Achievement in Science Education," Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering, Vol. 4, #2-3, 1998. $59 from Begell House, 212/725-1999.

Andy Molloy

The City of Angles

Who:
Peter Barricelli

Job:
Gifted/talented coordinator and enrichment teacher, K-8, Messalonskee School District, Oakland, Maine

Bright Idea:
Barricelli's fifth graders are in their own world—one he's helped to build.

Since 1992, he's been using architecture and city planning to turn students on to a number of subject areas.

Using real construction blueprints, students measure their own houses, reduce them to scale drawings, find the mean house size for their class, and build that house to scale. The house is glued onto a city built on plywood that has grown over the years to 7' by 12'.

Students consult with architects on space needed for air ducts. They've designed an underground transportation system and discussed air pollution and water treatment.

"One math group can figure out fractions, while advanced students make blueprints for new industries," says Barricelli, who provides a step-by-step teacher's guide to building a city in *Create A Co-Op City: A Cooperative Adventure Using Architecture and Design* ($9.95, J.L.B. Publishers).

Impact:
The project has built enthusiasm for learning. At the land distribution class—which involves averaging, probability, and a 10-sided die—"kids bring calculators," Barricelli reports. "They throw the die, and everyone's cheering. It's unbelievable!"

For More:
Contact Barricelli by E-mail at info@co-opcity.com, Fax 207/877-8582, or visit the Web at www.co-opcity.com.

Making the Grade for All Students

A typical high school student hears anti-gay slurs up to 26 times a day—and faculty intervene only 3 percent of the time. Nineteen percent of gay and lesbian students suffer physical attacks based on sexual orientation; 13 percent skip school at least once a month; 26 percent drop out.

Grading Our Schools, a recent report endorsed by NEA, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Association of School Psychologists, graded 42 of the nation's largest public school districts on how well they protect gay and lesbian students and teachers from harassment and discrimination.

The average grade: *D*.

Only eight districts received an *A*. They had policies that:

- Protect students and teachers from harassment and discrimination.
- Provide staff with workshops and training.
- Support curriculum that includes information about the lives and contributions of gay and lesbian people.
- Allow and support the formation of Gay/Straight Alliances and other clubs addressing homophobia and heterosexism in school.

Source: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 212/727-0135, www.glsen.org

Students &

Good Stuff

Stress Management
Inspiring Tranquility: Stress Management and Learning Styles in the Inclusive Classroom provides information on dealing with the fight, flight, and fright response, relaxation techniques for students and educators, identifying learning styles, and working effectively with ADHD students or students with hypotonia (severely reduced muscle tone). 119 pp., $10.95 for NEA members plus $5 s&h from the NEA Professional Library, stock # 2592-6-00-FG. Call 800/229-4200.

Reading Poverty
"Poverty has everything to do with schooling," writes Patrick Shannon in *Reading Poverty*. Shannon examines how social, political, and economic contexts affect literacy education—including assumptions about IQ tests, textbook content, standardized achievement tests, and more—to produce a system that offers "camouflaged support for cultural and economic inequities." 230 pp., $20 plus $4 s&h from Heinemann. To order, call 800/225-5800 or visit the Web at www.heinemann.com.

Harassment in Schools
Two new resource guides can help schools develop sexual harassment policies: *Do the Right Thing: Understanding, Addressing, and Preventing Sexual Harassment in Schools* ($15) and *Righting the Wrongs: A Legal Guide to Understanding, Addressing, and Preventing Sexual Harassment* ($35). To order, contact Verna Williams at the National Women's Law Center, 11 Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 202/588-5180, Fax 202/588-5185. For more information on Title IX and sexual harassment, see the "Rights Watch" column on page 25 of this *NEA Today*.

Teaching for Diversity
In *Teaching for Diversity*, Ricardo Garcia discusses how to teach a student body that may differ in race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and family incomes—and how to teach these same students to deal with diversity. Included are seven strategies for translating theory into practice. 147 pp., $15 from Phi Delta Kappa International, 800/766-1156.

You know you have a problem when . . .

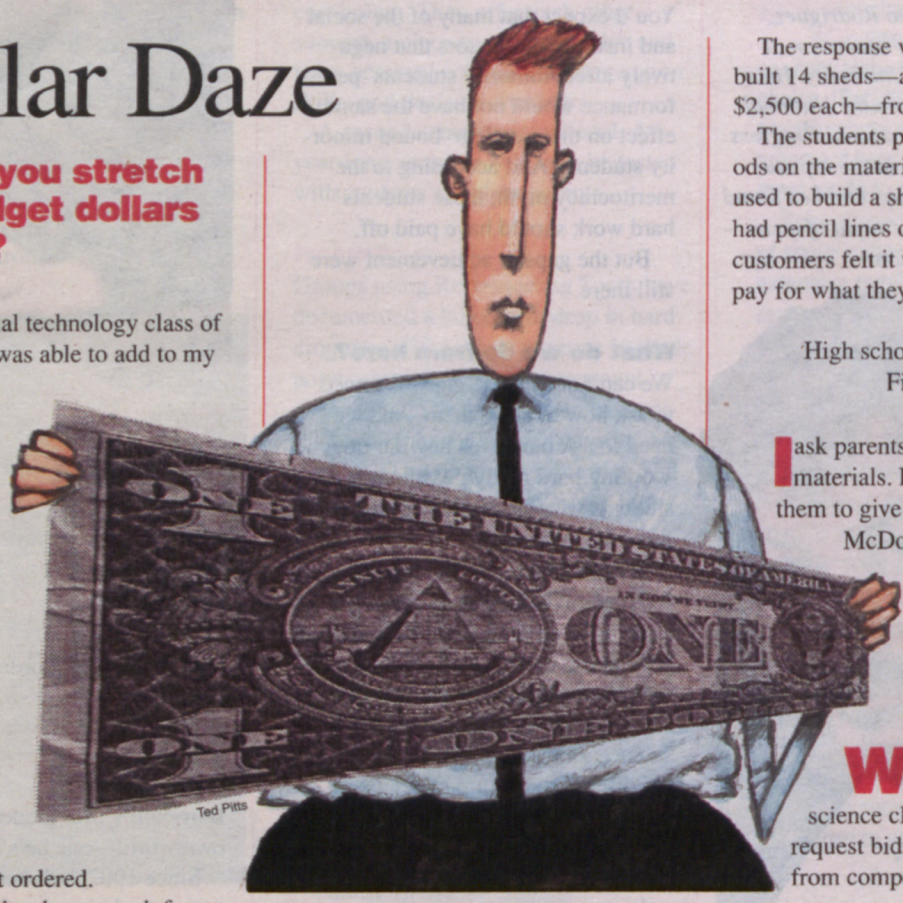
"The pencil sharpener has a crayon in it, and the electric sharpener is broken."

Amelia Crawford, kindergarten teacher, Pasadena, California

Dilemma

Dollar Daze

How do you stretch your budget dollars at work?



In my industrial technology class of past years, I was able to add to my materials by creative buying and downright scrounging.

When purchasing supplies at the local building store, I would offer to take the short lengths of material if they would give me more than the amount ordered.

Another way has been to ask for damaged or partially damaged goods, which are fine for student projects. Many times, the discard piles are "donated" to schools rather than taken to local landfills.

Now several of our local supply businesses will call schools on a rotating basis about these discards.

Richard Meneghelli
Eighth grade science, math, and technology teacher
Wasilla, Alaska

I reuse disks mailed to me by online vendors. I erase and reformat them, and then use them to store files.

Wilma King
Computer specialist
Dallas, Texas

I put all of my technology news and memos on the back of the daily bulletin on days when the back would otherwise be blank, so one piece of paper will be fully used.

Ed McCarty
High school computer resource teacher
Wilmington, North Carolina

When I place my order at the end of the school year, I order extra so I can trade with people.

Mace Bravin
Seventh grade teacher
Tucson, Arizona

I make my students budget their food money—if they run out of money, they can't cook. It makes them more responsible.

Jacque Harrod
High school family and consumer science teacher
Worland, Wyoming

I'm a high school carpentry instructor. My budget is approximately $8,000 a year, and I purchase more than $16,000 in construction-related materials off budget.

How? I just appeal to the greed of people who want work done for free, cost of materials only.

My program is called residential carpentry. Last year, we called the local newspaper and ran an ad saying that we'd build sheds for the cost of materials only.

The response was unbelievable. We built 14 sheds—at a cost of $900 to $2,500 each—from October to June.

The students practiced layout methods on the materials before they were used to build a shed, so some sheds had pencil lines on the inside. But customers felt it was a small price to pay for what they received.

Michael Napieralski
High school carpentry instructor
Fiskdale, Massachusetts

I ask parents to donate or recycle materials. For example, I ask them to give me the toys from McDonald's kid meals so I can use them for rewards.

Bernice Marier
K-3 teacher
Fallbrook, California

We combine the orders for several expensive science classes and then request bids for the entire order from competing vendors.

John Zoeckler
High school chemistry/AP biology teacher
Brea, California

Doing these things has helped me stretch my budget a little further:

- When possible, replacing things by making them myself.
- Having students bring things from home when working on projects.
- Asking for teacher discounts.
- Seeing what I can do with things other colleagues don't want anymore.

Judy Pounds
Fourth grade teacher
Hillsborough, North Carolina

Got an Answer?

What do you do when a student damages your property?

Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Strategies

You know you've been successful when . . .

"A non-reader feels 'safe' enough to volunteer to sound out reading vocabulary words in class."

Karen Baxley, second grade teacher, Greeneville, Tennessee

Delight

Reading Railroads Low Scores

Two Pennsylvania schools find greater success for all by introducing a new reading program.

Two years ago, only 4 percent of the students at Kelly Elementary in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, were rated "advanced readers." Today, that number has jumped to 25 percent.

At a school where 65 percent of new students enter reading below grade level, one-third of the kindergartners are now reading at the second semester of the first grade level.

And on the Pennsylvania State Assessment, Kelly students' reading scores leaped 80 points between last year and this.

Jan Donnell, reading facilitator at Kelly, credits much of these gains to Success for All, a reading program developed at Johns Hopkins University that creates "solid, continuous improvement."

The Title I funded program focuses on extensive reading and writing to improve student achievement in all subject areas. And it hones higher order thinking.

As a result, the number of students reading below grade level has dropped dramatically.

"And kids are thinking at a higher level," says Donnell. Their reasoning and writing have become more sophisticated, and words like "good" or "sad" have been replaced with more vivid words—"triumphant" or "ashamed."

Staff or parents can refer students to a support team, composed of school staff and other individuals. Each week, the team selects a goal for the students—being more punctual, changing a particular behavior, getting new clothes, or getting help in speech or language. With each success, goals are expanded.

Johnston Elementary, also in Wilkinsburg's high-poverty district, adopted Success for All three years ago and has built a similar record of student achievement.

On the state assessment in 1997, students had increased their combined math and reading scores by 55 points. Children starting in first grade that year were brought up to speed. In fact, they were ready to read at the second grade level by the end of the year.

"We've never experienced that before," says Lynn Black, Johnston's reading facilitator. "Immersing the children in reading has allowed them to become more confident and competent readers—and more willing and able to tackle social studies, math, and science.

"Our students are getting between two and three hours of reading reinforcement per day, and our home requirement draws in family involvement," Black notes.

One payoff: most of Johnston's sixth graders are advanced readers and better prepared to enter middle school.

These strides stand in stark contrast to the story from Turner Elementary, the third elementary school in the low-income area of Wilkinsburg.

Turner captured headlines four years ago when the school board decided to pay the for-profit Alternative Public Schools (now Beacon Education Management) $2.7 million a year to turn the school around.

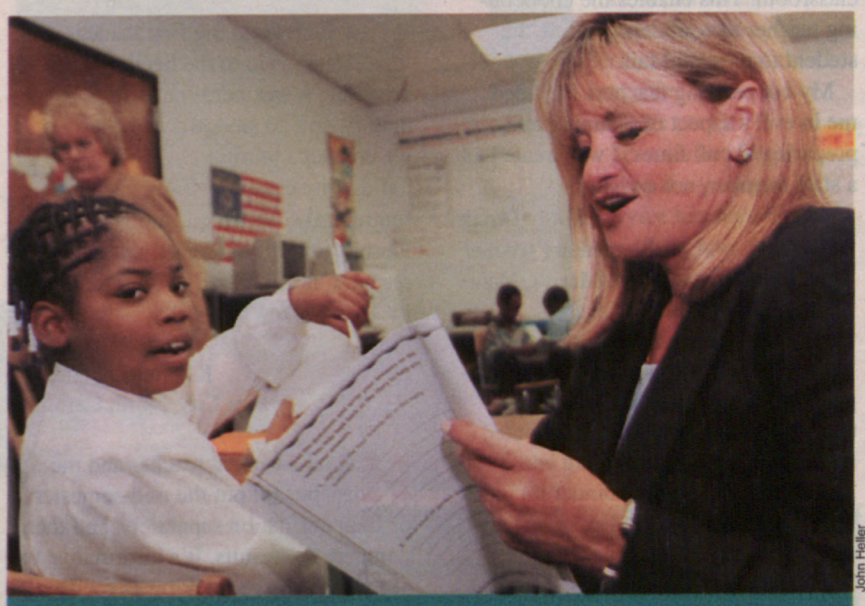
Since then, student achievement has lagged sadly behind Kelly and Johnston elementaries.

"We knew that privatization wasn't the way to go," says Mike Evans, president of the Wilkinsburg Education Association. "We need to teach every student, and I'm not sure that's one of the missions of privatization."

The public doesn't buy the privatization argument anymore either. This year, Tucker Elementary returned to public hands. And it's considering adopting Success for All as its new course for the future.

For More Information

Contact Jan Donnell at 412/371-9504, ext. 239, or Lynn Black at 412/731-4680, ext. 225. E-mail Mike Evans at mevans8044@aol.com.



John Heller

Reading facilitator Lynn Black has reason to smile—reading scores are up and interest in all subject areas has blossomed since the reading program Success for All was introduced in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, elementaries.

Idea Exchange

Pick a Card

For a truly random method of deciding where to place the correct answer on a multiple-choice test, I use a deck of cards. I shuffle the cards, cut the deck, and then turn the cards up one at a time.

If the card is a club, the correct answer will be "a." A diamond means "b"; a heart means "c"; and a spade, "d." For true-false questions, I use the card color—red is "true," black is "false."

Roger Rea
Omaha, Nebraska

Musical Checkers

In my elementary music class, we draw music symbols on the red squares of a checkerboard. Students place their checkers on the red squares and play a regular game of checkers—except that when they want to move to a square, they must name the symbol on that square correctly before moving.

The first few times we play, we use "cheat sheets" until the students are familiar with the symbols. This game can be played in grades three through seven.

Boyce Pearson
Little Rock, Arkansas

Puzzled over Storage?

One segment of the program I teach includes jigsaw puzzles. With 20 students doing jigsaw puzzles at one time, how could we keep each puzzle intact as the kids worked on them from day to day?

Pizza boxes! Students build puzzles in their boxes. When the bell rings, they simply close the lid, and pieces not used yet go back into the puzzle's original box. A little hair spray on the grease spots or a piece of paper glued on them keeps the puzzle pieces clean.

Carolyn Corbett
Elizabeth, West Virginia

Share Your Ideas

You can pass along your tips to *NEA Today*'s more than 2.4 million readers in one of four ways:

- By mail: *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- By phone: 202/822-7201
- By fax: 202/822-7206
- By E-mail: Ideas@neatoday.nea.org

Professional

Good Stuff

Tips for New Teachers
Student teachers, beginning teachers, and teacher mentors will all find news they can use in *Bright Ideas: A Pocket Mentor for Beginning Teachers.* This compact, 56-page book offers pointers on communication skills, classroom management, cyberspace—and knowing when to say no to too many demands. $4.50 for NEA members from the NEA Professional Library, stock #2153-3-00-FG. Call 800/229-4200 to order.

Rural Teacher Network
Through the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, public school teachers from Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Vermont can pursue summer graduate study with top professors on the teaching of writing, creative writing, drama, and literary study. For more information, contact the Bread Loaf School of English, Sunderland Language Center, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753, 802/443-5418, Fax 802/443-2060. Visit the Web at www.blse.middlebury.edu or E-mail: BLSE@breadnet.middlebury.edu.

Professional Portfolios
Teaching portfolios can be more than a scrapbook used for teacher evaluation. They can be a hallmark of teacher professionalism. *With Portfolio in Hand: Validating the New Teacher Professionalism* discusses how portfolios can present the complexity of effective teaching practice and includes hands-on guidance to help teachers prepare quality portfolios. 288 pp., $24.95 plus $2.50 s&h from Teachers College Press, 800/575-6566, Fax 802/864-7626.

Math and Science Pairs
Growth Initiatives for Teachers is a grant program for grade 7-12 science and math teachers. Every year, the GTE Foundation recognizes 60 teams of one math and one science teacher from the same school who plan to integrate the subjects in their school's curriculum through the use of technology. Each winning team receives $7,000 for a school enrichment project and $5,000 toward professional development. For more information, visit the Web at www.gte.com/g/community/gift.html or call 800/315-5010.

You know you have a problem when . . .

"Even your favorite colleagues hide when they know you're looking for support."

M.H. Weems, third grade teacher, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Dilemma

Young Faces Take Their Places

How do you make the collaboration with a student teacher a success for everyone?

Ted Pitts

A couple of days before a student teacher arrives, I hang up a large banner with the person's name on it—similar to the one with my name on it. It's a great way to introduce the student teacher to the students, and it gives the kids the opportunity to ask questions about that person.

This process also helps the students get used to the idea that there will be another person in the room.

Beth Lemberger
Eighth grade social studies and math teacher
Bethesda, Maryland

I recently completed my student teaching requirements and found that the best experiences are those with mutual trust and respect at the core. The student teacher must also be well trained and informed upon entering the classroom. This enables the cooperating teacher to confidently allow the student to try—and fail.

My cooperating teachers included me in every aspect of planning and preparing. At all times, I was treated as a staff member, not a visitor.

Kathy Davis
Elementary teacher
St. Maries, Idaho

When I meet with my student teachers for the first time, I present them with a three-ring binder that contains "everything you wanted to know about this classroom and school, and more." The binder includes schedules, classroom rules, class lists, seating charts, forms, the school newsletter, and policy books.

The first day a student teacher is in class, I present copies of the seating charts that have information on certain students—which ones need tests, have allergies, have learning disabilities.

I also always make sure student teachers have their own desk, and I stock it with supplies. That way, the class knows the person there is another teacher, not just a student teacher.

Debbie Winger
Middle school teacher
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Last year, I had my first student teacher. Due to the hectic work schedule, it was hard for us to find quality time to sit down and chat. So we created a journal.

I'd write comments, suggestions, fun remarks, or ask questions in the journal, and my student teacher would respond. It turned out to be something we both looked forward to.

Pat Taylor
K-6 music educator
Elm City, North Carolina

Have the student teacher and the teacher fill out the mid-semester or final evaluation separately, and then compare the results. It's informative to see where you're thinking alike. The evaluations also help the student teacher see which areas need more emphasis or change.

I also recall my own days as a student teacher and still relate one thing I learned from my supervising teacher some 30 years ago: "Don't start talking until everyone is ready."

Joyce King
Third grade master teacher
Las Vegas, Nevada

Incorporate the student teacher's interests into your curriculum. One of my student teachers, from St. Louis, gave an excellent presentation on why Chicago outstripped St. Louis as the Midwest's largest city. Another, a descendent of Jane Addams, gave a wonderful presentation on Hull House.

Ronald Levitsky
Junior high social studies teacher
Northfield, Illinois

For more responses, visit NEA Today Online *at www.nea.org/neatoday.*

Got a Answer?

How do you find time to write a grant proposal?
Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Growth

You know you've been successful when . . .

"You meet a 28-year-old teacher at a literacy workshop—and he's a student you had when you taught fourth grade."

Louis Carl Padula, grade 7-12 math/science teacher, Lemon Grove, California

Delight

Teaching Future Teachers

Pre-service teachers connect with kids—and reality—through a veteran teacher in rural Mississippi.

Connections are important in rural Sumrall, Mississippi, especially to eighth grade teacher Patricia Parrish.

Through her Connections Project, pre-service teachers at the University of Southern Mississippi get a good look at their future as they work with Parrish's eighth grade English students at Sumrall Attendance Center.

Parrish started collaborating with Susan Malone, the university's director of English education, on the project four years ago. Students in Malone's Adolescent Literature and Composition Theory classes now work with eighth graders, reading and discussing literary works and exchanging book reviews.

The college students have come away with real-life classroom experience. And the eighth graders have improved their reading and writing skills, inspired by their unique relationship with their college partners.

"I've noticed how the pre-service teachers compare and contrast their eighth grade partners to themselves when they were students of the same age," says Parrish. "Some comment on how alike they are, but most say they never knew students could be so different.

"They begin to see what a challenge teaching diverse students with varied interests will be," she adds. "Some are amazed at the lower ability or apathetic students because, I think, most English teachers-to-be were 'good' students and imagine the day when they will teach rooms full of students like themselves.

"This project helps them see reality," says Parrish.

The junior high students meet with their college partners in person occasionally throughout the school year. But the bulk of their contact is through written correspondence.

At first, Parrish drove the papers, comments, and reviews 15 miles back and forth, from Sumrall to the university in Hattiesburg, every week.

Then, in 1996, her project got wired—and computers, E-mail, and the Internet became part of the learning equation.

"Expecting the technology to make things easier was a big mistake," says Parrish. But the pre-service teachers got vital computer time.

"I've been surprised at how little contact many of them have had with computers," she notes. "So this is good for them, since they'll have to deal with technology as a tool in their teaching arsenal."

Parrish's project was sparked by a 1993 fellowship to the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, a program out of Vermont's Middlebury College that encourages creative teaching and creates professional development opportunities for rural teachers.

While providing unique pre-service training for tomorrow's teachers, Parrish has found herself contemplating new insights on teaching.

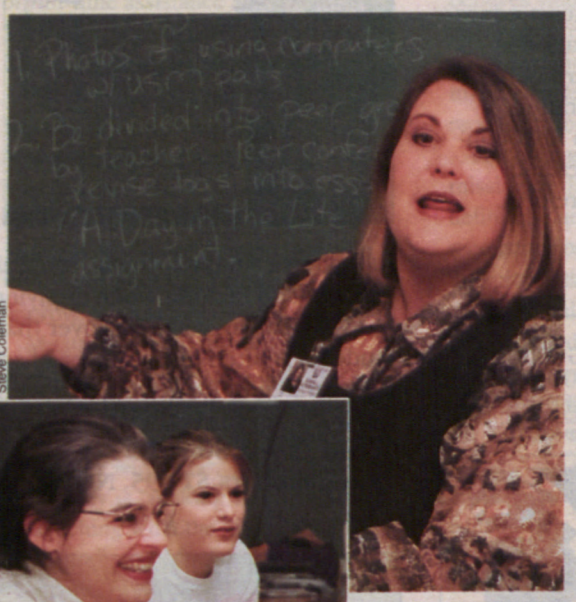
The class prankster, it turns out, took writing seriously with his college partner. "You try too hard to write a good story," the eighth grader wrote after one of their essay exchanges. "Loosen up and just write."

One girl, who penned elaborate narrative letters to her college partner, wrote, "I really cannot write long stories. I guess that is not one of my talents."

"Obviously, this girl can develop a piece of writing," says Parrish. "How can I make the academic writing she does as meaningful as her narrative letters to her college partner?"

Parrish has found that "even the youngest pre-service teachers often comment how they forgot what it was like in junior high and how hard things often are for adolescents of this age.

"The great thing," she concludes, "is that I'm reminded of this, too."



Steve Coleman

Veteran teacher Patricia Parrish (above) gives pre-service teachers like Therese Langley (far left) a look at coming distractions as they work extensively with her eighth grade students.

For More Information

E-mail Patricia Parrish at Patricia_Parrish@breadnet.middlebury.edu or visit the Web at wwwdept.usm.edu/~connect/connec.html. "Good Stuff" on page 22 has more on the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network.

Idea Exchange

The Next Generation

The support for new teachers at my school is incredible. I'm a second-year high school chemistry teacher—and these are the highlights, from my point of view.

- We have three paid days of orientation for first-, second-, and third-year teachers. The orientation focuses on classroom management and lesson development.
- Every other week, first-year teachers meet with three site mentor teachers.

They help us out and explain things like back-to-school night, evaluations, parent-teacher meetings, and other niceties that were never covered in education school. These meetings are also paid.

- The mentors pop into classes of first-, second-, and third-year teachers to informally observe and give feedback.

The beauty of this set-up: administrators may alert a mentor to a problem a new teacher is having, but the administration is never allowed to ask the mentors about new teachers, and the mentors are not allowed to talk to administrators about new teachers.

The mentors—kind of like priests at the confessional—receive a paid release period to perform their duties.

Susan Smith
Tamalpais, California

Works4Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? Pass along your tips to *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail: ideas@neatoday.nea.org.

For more tips, check out NEA's weekly E-mail service, Works4Me. To sign up, send an E-mail to lyris@list.nea.org.

- In the "subject" line, type: sign me up, NEA!
- In the message block, type: subscribe Works4Me
- Send the message.

To submit your own tip, E-mail it to: owner-Works4Me @list.nea.org.

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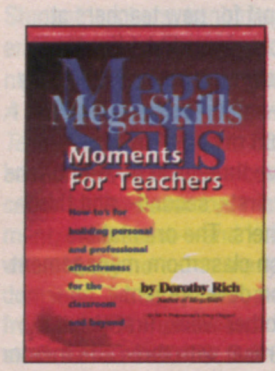
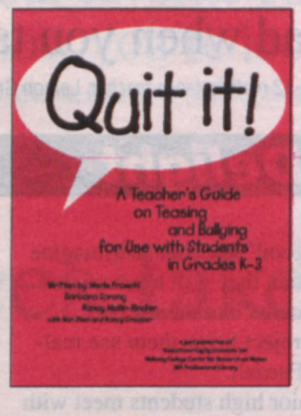


MegaSkills® Moments for Teachers

By Dr. Dorothy Rich

Have you ever felt like this?: "When a batch of homework papers come in, I sometimes wish I hadn't assigned them. I just feel so overloaded." If so, there's a new book you ought to read that can help you feel like this: "Today, a colleague dropped by my classroom to tell me she admired what a good job I was doing!" *MegaSkills Moments for Teachers* is the all-new book by Dorothy Rich that shows what you can do—easily and quickly—to turn everyday problem situations into opportunities for personal and professional growth.

204 pp., 1998, Stock #2006-5-00-D3,
Non-members $12.95, NEA Members $9.95



Quit It!: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use with Students in Grades K-3

By Froschl, Sprung, Mullin-Rindler, Stein

Now you can "bullyproof" your K-3 classroom with this comprehensive teacher's guide. How can it help you cope with the serious problem of classroom bullying? This book's nine classroom lessons not only help you and your students create awareness but also give you the tools you need to explore strategies for prevention. Plus, you'll get ideas for physical games and exercises, reproducible worksheets, and family activity letters.

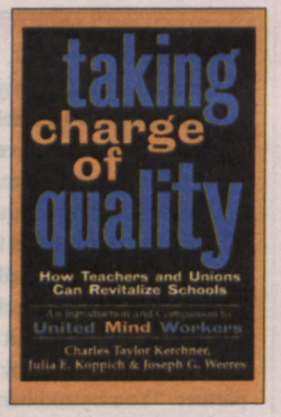
128 pp., 1998, Stock #1881-8-00-D3,
Non-members $19.95, NEA Members $15.95

Taking Charge of Quality

By Charles Taylor Kerchner, Julia K. Koppich, and Joseph G. Weeres

A companion to *United Mind Workers*, this is the ultimate book-club/study-group discussion starter on New Unionism. This concise booklet offers a solid blueprint for improving teaching and learning, setting higher standards, and taking charge of the profession through peer review. Explore the role of teachers unions and the importance of teachers to American Democracy in the 21st century, by adding this book to your reading list today.

56 pp., 1998, Stock #2168-1-00-D3,
Non-members $7.95, NEA Members $6.95

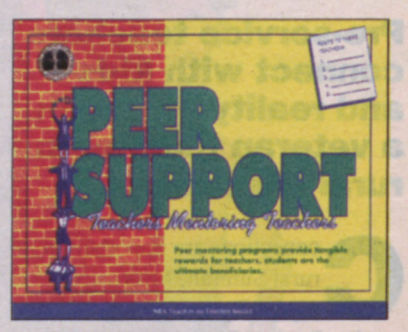

taking charge of quality
How Teachers and Unions Can Revitalize Schools
United Mind Workers
Charles Taylor Kerchner, Julia E. Koppich & Joseph G. Weeres

Peer Support: Teachers Mentoring Teachers

NEA Teacher-to-Teacher Books

Find out how teachers across the nation are reaching out to their colleagues for advice and support through peer mentoring programs. Learn how they set up mentoring programs, created effective collegial partnerships, and gained insight into their roles as mentors and mentees. Whether you are already involved in a similar program, getting ready to start one in your district, or just interested in exploring this topic, you'll find this book a valuable resource.

96 pp., 1998, Stock #2913-5-00-D3,
Non-members $12.95, NEA Members $9.95



Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls

AAUW Educational Foundation

Many schools are experimenting with the single-sex approach to learning. This book examines the findings of the foremost educational scholars on single-sex education in grades K-12 to discover if girls learn better apart from boys. It includes a literature review and a summary of a forum that considered what role single sex classes and schools should play in education reform.

108 pp., 1998, Stock #2505-9-00-D3,
Non-members $12.95, NEA Members $11.95

How To Get Grants and Free Stuff

NEA Teacher-to-Teacher Books

Running out of ideas to enhance your school's limited resources? This book tells you where to seek sources for grants, how to decide which grants to apply for, and how to maximize your chances for success You'll get expert advice on how to effectively write grants by following a simple formula. You'll also learn not only helpful tips on the essentials to include when applying for grants, but also the fatal flaws to avoid. Finally, you'll discover that getting free resources for your students is often just a matter of asking, as enterprising teachers share their strategies for getting free stuff—from computer equipment and technical support to sports gear and training support.

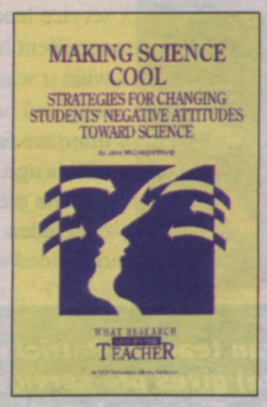
96 pp., 1998, Stock #2914-3-00-D3,
Non-members $12.95, NEA Members $9.95

Making Science Cool: Strategies for Changing Students' Negative Attitudes Toward Science

By Jane McCraight-Wertz

Many students say science is boring. How can you counteract students' negative view of science? The answer is in *Making Science Cool*, where you'll discover the link between positive attitudes and student success; strategies for altering the classroom environment to make science exciting, accessible, and relevant; and ways to involve parents and peers in the process.

32 pp., 1998, Stock #1099-X-00-D3,
Non-members $5.95, NEA Members $4.50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Inside Scoop

Can Reconstitution Fix Failing Schools?

Fueled by a widespread get-tough attitude toward chronically low-performing schools, states and districts across the country are taking a drastic step in an attempt to turn these schools around. It's called "reconstitution."

A definition.

At its most drastic, "reconstitution" means disbanding a school's faculty and reopening the building with a new staff, structure, and curriculum. This final, radical step is often—but not always—preceded by a phased-in process that offers time and resources for improvement.

Most often, when schools reach the last stage, teachers can reapply for their jobs or seek positions elsewhere in the district.

At least 23 states have policies for intervening and requiring major changes in low-performing schools. Seventeen states have handed down this authority to the districts.

How's a school targeted for reconstitution?

Policies differ from state to state, but schools are usually targeted based on poor student performance on large-scale assessment tests.

An NEA survey of educators in the midst of reconstitution indicates strong sentiment for the criteria to include "multiple measures of school performance, not a single test score." Survey results also show that criteria should be well defined and communicated to staff, students, and parents far in advance of any state or district action.

What's the verdict on reconstitution?

In the NEA survey, the majority of educators felt that reconstitution could help ailing schools under some circumstances. But just as many were angry with its implementation.

More than one-quarter of the educators surveyed who've experienced reconstitution were unaware their schools had been pinpointed as low-performing—and 22 percent said their school shake-up came as "a complete shock."

Teachers in schools reconstituted by districts, as opposed to states, were much more likely to characterize the process as "arbitrary, chaotic, and irrational."

Cay Spitzer, a third grade teacher at John Adams Elementary in Colorado Springs, Colorado, would agree with that assessment. The staff at Adams had developed a school improvement plan and had just returned from a productive day-long writing workshop in 1997 when word came from district officials that all staff—from the crossing guards to the principal—had to reapply for their jobs.

"None of us had quarrels with the fact that there needed to be changes," says Spitzer. "But I'd have thought the district would have found out what we were doing before they came in and said, 'You're doing it wrong and we're going to change it.'"

Only three out of 30 staff members returned to Adams. Most didn't even bother to reapply.

So what's a good alternative to reconstitution?

In Kentucky, the process for improving schools concentrates on building the "capacity" for success among teachers, students, and administrators.

The state has allocated millions to make this work. And the money and expert guidance that have flowed into schools can make a dramatic difference, says Steve Moats, a veteran teacher and Kentucky Education Association board member.

For two years, Moats has worked as a "distinguished educator," trained to help schools in crisis put themselves back on the road to success.

These schools get at least two years of full-time assistance and as much as $100,000. And all teachers and administrators undergo extensive evaluations.

"No one has ever lost their job because of their evaluation," says Moats, and Kentucky hasn't resorted to completely restaffing any school.

"It's punitive to split up a staff," Moats adds. "It makes more sense to work with what you've got and improve the teaching."

Moats has found that "in most schools, the problem is a lack of focus." He helps staff develop strategies and long-term plans to figure out how to get where they want to be.

One key is "making sure teachers are teaching what the kids are being tested on," says Moats. This means emphasizing writing skills—critical to success on the open-ended questions on state assessments.

What are the results so far?

In Kentucky, test scores are improving—a success that Moats attributes to the state's alternative approach to low-performing schools.

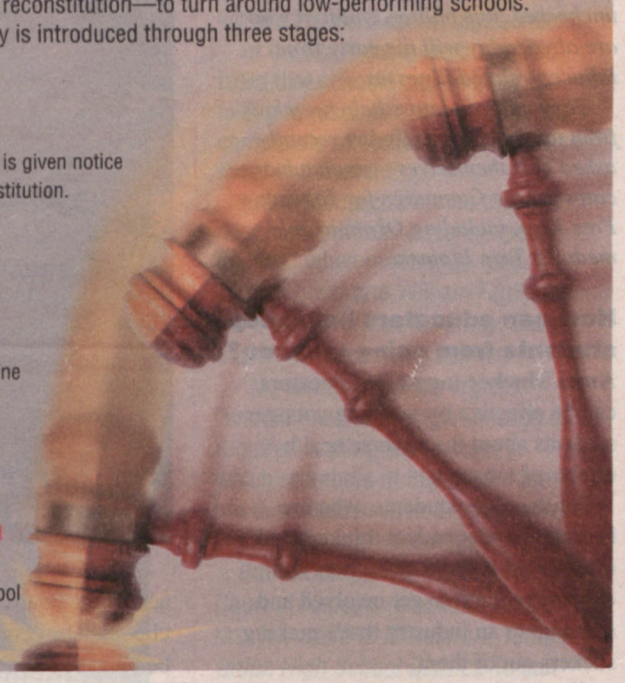
Going, Going, Gone

School districts and states nationwide are using rewards and sanctions—including the threat of reconstitution—to turn around low-performing schools. Reconstitution typically is introduced through three stages:

STAGE 1: A NOTICE
A low-performing school is given notice that it's eligible for reconstitution.

STAGE 2: A WARNING WITH CONSEQUENCES
A school is given a deadline for improvement.

STAGE 3: RECONSTITUTION
A school district or state decides to disband a school and replace all staff.



In the NEA survey, most members reported that reconstitution brought extra assistance and professional development opportunities. But only 46 percent said their schools saw improvement in achievement.

In Colorado Springs, reconstitution hasn't brought lots of resources, new programs, or even benchmark goals from the district, says Cay Spitzer. She believes student achievement is on the rise—but credits a "determined" staff and a community that became more involved after being shut out of the reconstitution decision.

According to the Education Commission of the States, evidence is definitely lacking on the effects of reconstitution. One study calls academic progress—at least as measured by standardized test scores—"uneven" in reconstituted schools.

But reconstitution "can send a message that state and district policy makers will not tolerate chronic student failure," the study notes. "In so doing, reconstitutions may put pressure on educators to re-evaluate their efforts."

Where does NEA stand?

"Educators want to be sure that the process has validity—that there's some chance of helping the schools to improve," says NEA staffer Jacques Nacson.

NEA's approach includes focusing on resources and programs to keep low-performing schools from sinking to the point of total reconstitution.

Nacson adds that states need to set benchmarks that recognize a school's steady and continuous improvement. "If the benchmarks aren't realistic," he notes, "what's the point?"

Some states and districts consider reconstitution a "magic bullet," he warns. "They say, 'Just get tough, and education is going to improve.'

"Reconstitution won't work unless the process is used judiciously—as a way to offer technical and other assistance—to improve schools," says Nacson. "It's not a matter of passing the legislation and then moving on to something else."

For More Information

- *Reconstituting Low-Performing Schools, and the Role of the Union in School Improvement*, a new report from NEA, is available on the Web at www.nea.org/neatoday.
- *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*, a free publication from the U.S. Department of Education, is available by calling 877/433-7827. Or visit the Web at www.ed.gov/pubs/turning.
- *State Takeovers and Reconstitutions*, a policy brief from the Education Commission of the States, is available on the Web at www.ecs.org.

Health

Only 'Suckers' Use Tobacco

The war against teen smoking rages on. More than 1.2 million students under the age of 18 started smoking daily in 1996—a 73 percent jump from 1988. If current trends remain unchecked, five million children who are alive today will die early from tobacco-related illnesses.

How can educators help keep kids from tobacco? NEA Today *recently asked kids themselves—youth advocates for the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, including Olympic gold medalist Tara Lipinski.*

Students take up the anti-tobacco crusade—and tell adults how to get the message through to kids more effectively.

How can educators help keep students from using tobacco?

Anna Markee (age 17): Educators can be effective by teaching younger students about the adverse health effects of tobacco.

For the older students, who are becoming independent thinkers and often resist authority, teachers can encourage them to get involved and stand up to an industry that's making suckers out of them.

Gretchen Sneegas (age 11): It's the little things that count. Have kids do a tobacco control activity, even if it's something as simple as a poster contest. Your class can write letters to the editors of local newspapers, or to restaurants with lots of secondhand smoke. If you find out about a bill having to do with tobacco, you or your students can testify.

Emily Broxterman (age 16): It's easy for students to ignore teachers if they simply lecture kids and present them with statistics. Most kids already know what smoking can do to them.

Teachers would get a better response if they had more interaction with kids. Discuss the real issues behind tobacco and get them involved as advocates—then they'll listen.

Tara Lipinski (age 16): Tobacco control should be taught in classes across the board, not just in health classes. The economics of tobacco can be taught in math class, students can do an essay on tobacco initiatives in English class, or government teachers can have students study the politics of tobacco legislation.

Deanna Durrett (age 16): Educators should concentrate on the short-term effects of tobacco use, since most kids can't look 30 years down the road.

You can tell students that smoking causes cancer, but what you should really be telling them is that they may not make the "A" basketball team if they smoke because they'll have a hard time breathing during the games.

Tell students they can't buy the clothes and CDs other kids will have money for, because most of their money will be going to feed a horrible addiction.

Gary de Sesa (age 18): It's important to present students with the facts about the health consequences of tobacco use, the way the tobacco companies profit at kids' expense, and how students have the power to stop their schemes.

Educators are so swamped—why should they get involved in the debate over tobacco?

Amanda Tunnell (age 16): Smoking is the number one cause of preventable death—and almost 90 percent of adult smokers begin at or before age 18. Aren't the statistics enough?

Broxterman: Students can develop amazing ideas and plans, but without the help of teachers, the logistics of carrying them out are more difficult.

Educators can provide the opportunities that make kids' voices heard. If you ask for their help, you'll be surprised at how many kids want to make a difference on this issue.

Anna Santiago (age 16): Because it will save lives. That's the bottom line.

Resources

For more information on the following programs and events, contact the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 1707 L St., N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036, 202/296-5469, Fax 202/296-5427. On the Web at www.tobaccofreekids.org.

■ The annual Kick Butts Day, April 14, engages kids as youth advocates in the fight against tobacco as they hold anti-tobacco activities, such as mock funerals for the Marlboro Man, youth rallies at their state capitals, undercover buying operations, and mock trials for "Mr. Butts."

■ Join the Campaign's free National Action Network. You'll receive information on getting involved in activities such as urging your members of Congress to protect kids from tobacco or attending town hall meetings and candidate forums.

■ Contact the Campaign for materials you'll need to nominate a student for a youth advocate award in the fight against tobacco.

■ NEA's Health Information Network has collaborated with the Campaign in developing NEA's pilot tobacco control advocacy program. Future issues of *NEA Today* will introduce the pioneering work this program is doing with NEA affiliates around the country. For more information on this program, contact NEA HIN at 800/718-8387.

From the Network

The NEA Health Information Network suggests the following helpful resources.

Tobacco-Free America
Kick Butts!: A Kid's Action Guide to a Tobacco-Free America complements the April 14 Kick Butts Day with a history of the tobacco industry's tactics and tips for empowering students to become tobacco control advocates. It also features resources and stories about young people who have already become advocates. $9.95, ISBN 0-382-39633-2. To order, call 800/858-7674.

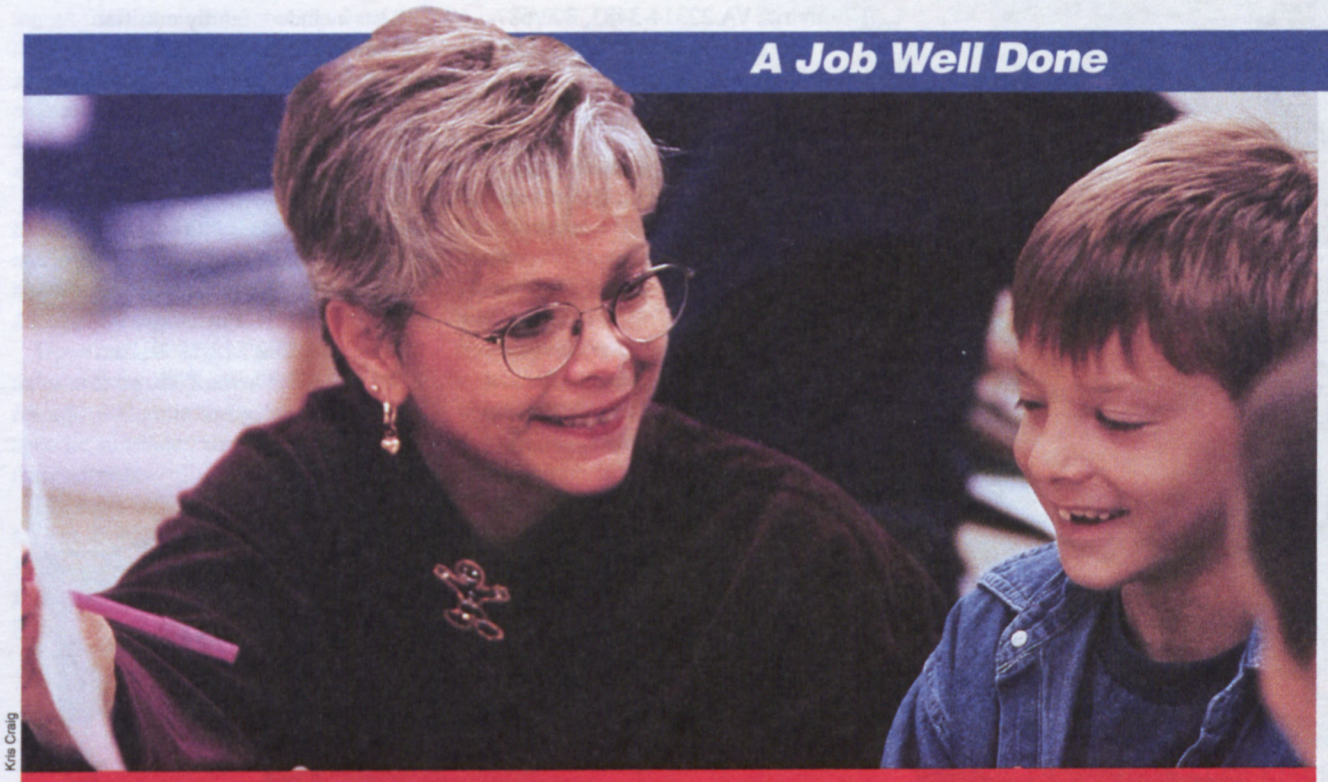
Media Literacy
MediaSharp, a media literacy resource guide for middle school and high school educators, offers interactive activities that focus on the portrayal of alcohol and tobacco in three major forms of media: advertising/marketing, entertainment, and news. For a free copy of the guide from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with an accompanying video, call 770/488-5705 (press 2). E-mail: tobaccoinfo@cdc.gov.

Five a Day
Need to convince elementary students that they need five servings of produce a day to stay healthy? A 500-page fruit and vegetable encyclopedia, plus classroom activities, can be found at www.dole5aday.com. The Dole Food Company also provides free CDs (with minimal logo presence), cookbooks, and charts to teachers and cafeteria staffers. To order, visit the Web site or contact Dole Nutrition Program, 155 Bovet Rd., Suite 476, San Mateo, CA 94402, Fax 650/570-5250. Send E-mail to dole.nutrition@bnt.com.

Breast Cancer Survivors
In *Can You Come Here Where I Am? The Poetry and Prose of Seven Breast Cancer Survivors*, NEA member Judy Thibault Klevins joins six other breast cancer survivors to offer an honest look at the medical and spiritual strategies that help on the journey from diagnosis to treatment to recovery. $21.95 plus $4 s&h from E.M. Press. Call 800/727-4630.

ESP Extra

A Job Well Done



Kris Craig

"I look at the child I'm working with," says Rhode Island paraprofessional Sandie Blankenship, "and say, 'What's the whole picture here?' What other paraprofessionals and I do is show students they're worth the effort—and then make them believe it!"

Holding It All Together

Like mortar, paraprofessionals fill in between the cracks to create solid citizens—and schools.

Name:
Sandie Blankenship

Job title:
Special education paraprofessional

Experience:
9 years

Name of NEA local affiliate:
North Kingstown (Rhode Island) Association of Paraprofessionals

What people don't understand about my job:
The range and flexibility of paraprofessional positions make it difficult for most folks to understand exactly where our role begins and ends. But I feel like we're the mortar that fits where it needs to fit to keep the whole structure together.

What I do:
I spent my first seven years as a paraprofessional at the high school level. Then last year, I worked in a first grade mainstream classroom with two special needs youngsters. I also helped other children who were having difficulty with academic subjects.

This year, I'm working with second graders. My job is to be there to assist and help reinforce academic programs, behavioral management programs, and social programs for successful communication. Basically, I help teach the whole range of living skills.

In addition to my classroom work, I also do cafeteria duty, recess duty, and bus duty. And I monitor special activities, such as art, music, or gym classes.

I've enjoyed my work at both the high school and elementary levels. We ESP are very adaptable, it seems, to whatever the need is.

My credentials:
I have an elementary education certificate, but I enjoy assisting teachers.

Continuing education:
I've completed workshops—ranging from a couple of hours to a couple of days—on behavior management, stress management, teaching strategy, dealing with difficult people, and modifying programs. I recently completed a workshop on dealing with autistic children, and I'm planning on taking a 16-hour restraint training course.

How I help students achieve:
I think I help students achieve by helping them attain their own level of self-confidence. So many children I've worked with have that "I can do this" piece missing.

Any paraprofessional working anywhere needs to help kids set goals they can reach. I look at the child I'm working with and say, "What's the whole picture here?" Then we plan baby steps to take so they can feel successful. What I and other paraprofessionals do is show students they're worth the effort—and then make them believe it!

Challenges I have met:
It takes time and dedication for professional growth. I've had to learn instinctively how to avoid crossing the line. That's been the biggest challenge because of the huge role of confidentiality in my job—not just in dealing with students, but in conversations with other school staff.

I've learned largely by trial and error over the years—that's the reality of this job. Sometimes you make a mistake and you need to be willing to admit it, reach out, and say, "How can I do better next time?"

How I team with teachers:
I've become quite involved with the union—as both vice president of my state ESP Association and president of my local Association—so I've had lots of training on staff collaboration. And I've been able to approach most teachers and give them my professional opinion. Whether or not we've agreed, they've taken in my observations.

Paras have more of an opportunity to make an observation—while teachers are often so busy they don't have the chance to do as much as they would love to do. We're another set of eyes and ears, able to point to things that others may have missed.

—Beth Garstkiewicz

To contact Sandie Blankenship, send E-mail to sanran@ids.net.

Tips from Sandie Blankenship

On Kids & Colleagues

On dealing with kids:
I always try to keep in good humor, and one of the things I've always done with the kids is to get to know their names.

Because I work in a mainstream program, I also work with regular ed kids in the classroom. I've learned you have to have discipline techniques, you have to be flexible and adaptable, and you have to be caring.

You also need an open heart and an open ear. The kids need to know they can depend on you.

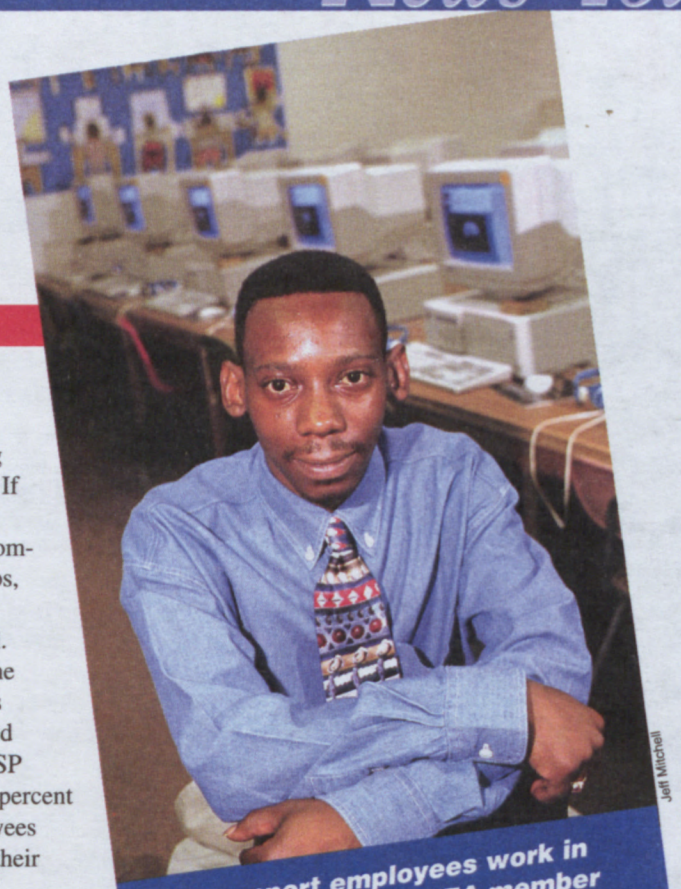
On dealing with other school employees:
You have a responsibility to identify and remember the roles of the people you're working with, be they speech or occupational therapists, teachers, counselors, or administrators.

You have to advocate for yourself as an ESP. Other employees often don't understand your role, so you have to help them understand it.

Open communication, even if it leads to a confrontational discussion, is better than not communicating at all.

News You Can Use

ESP Helping Kids Learn



More support employees work in technical jobs—like NEA member Franklin Brooks, who runs a computer lab in Camden, Arkansas.

Jeff Mitchell

Dedicated Workforce

What you've long suspected is true: If you want to find people who are committed to their jobs, look at education support personnel.

That's one of the findings of NEA's recently completed survey of K-12 ESP members. Eighty percent of support employees plan to stay with their ESP jobs.

An additional 12 percent plan to leave their jobs but stay in education—most of these are preparing to become teachers. Only 5 percent of ESP say they plan to leave education.

For more information about the NEA ESP membership survey, contact Carolyn Summers, NEA Research, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 202/822-7904. Send E-mail to Csummers@nea.org.

Technology Academy

In Wisconsin's Verona Area School District, support employees and teachers are learning how to use technology together. Last summer, for the first time, ESP from many different job classifications were able to enroll in the district's Technology Academy.

Participants learned skills they need on their jobs, including using software for word processing and teaching math and writing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, the Internet, and more.

Participants in the training were able to get credit toward the Wisconsin Education Association Council Professional Development Academy ESP Level I Certificate.

For details, contact Linda Christensen, Director of Instruction, Verona Area School District, 700 N. Main St., Verona, WI 53593, 608/845-6451. E-mail: christenl@verona.k12.wi.us.

Public Education Promo

Looking for tools to help you communicate with parents and community members? Try using NEA's Public Education Leaflets, available in Spanish and English from the NEA Professional Library.

NEA has published 35 different leaflets, covering topics like "Helping Children Deal With Stress," "Working Together For Education," and "Discipline That Works."

Reproducible leaflet masters cost $3 each (make as many copies as you need), or $105 for the complete set of 35 in one language. For more information, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

Help from Head Start

Parent's Guide After Head Start: Success in Public School is an easy, practical guide you can use to help parents and children make the transition to public schools.

Using common sense lessons from years of Head Start experience, the guide includes a sample introductory letter to the child's new principal and teacher, explains how parents can become familiar with their child's new school, and offers tips on assessing school curriculum, teacher training, and student progress.

This best-selling publication from the National Head Start Association is available for $4—in English or Spanish—from NHSA,1651 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3483, 800/687-5044. E-mail: genpub@nhsa.org. On the Web: www.nhsa.org/.

School Inclusion

What development in education has had the biggest impact on the jobs and responsibilities of support educators? Some would say inclusion, also known as the mainstreaming of students with special needs.

If you mix regular and special education students in the same classrooms, you might want to read NEA's *Appropriate Inclusion and Paraprofessionals: Changing Roles and Expectations.*

This booklet will help you learn how to adapt to changing roles and be an effective educator. Single copies are available free from the NEA ESP Program, 1201 16th St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 202/822-7131.

ESP Keeping Kids Safe, Healthy, and Well-Nourished

Traffic Safety Facts

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an average of 38 school-age children die each year in school bus related traffic crashes—10 school bus occupants and 28 pedestrians.

You can find this fact, and more information on 1985-1995 school bus safety, in *School Buses—Traffic Safety Facts.* On the Web at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa/factprev/busfacts.html.

From the Source

The Source: Indoor Air, Water and Your Schools, a free newsletter from NEA's Health Information Network, focuses on many issues of concern to ESP, ranging from school ventilation and drinking water quality to asthma.

To receive *The Source* or order other HIN publications, leave a message at 800/718-8387. You can also read *The Source* on the Web at www.nea.org/hin/source/ and order materials online from www.nea.org/hin/order/.

Food, Family, and Fun

Parents who want to help their children learn how to eat well can now get help from *Food, Family & Fun: A Seasonal Guide to Healthy Eating*, a new publication from USDA's Team Nutrition. *Food, Family & Fun* contains 50 new seasonal recipes for dishes like garden vegetable rice salad, chicken salad rollups, baked bananas, and "meal in a potato."

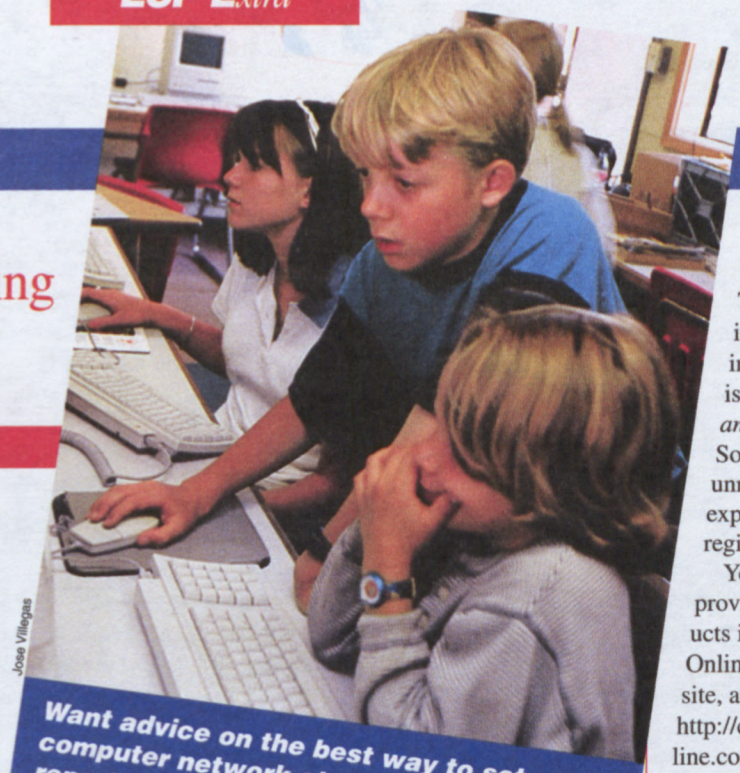
Also included: family nutrition education activities, information on the food guide pyramid, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, kitchen safety, and more.

The USDA has sent a copy of Food, Family & Fun to every elementary school, but copies may be purchased from the Government Printing Office (stock #001-000-04627-6) for $12. Write to Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA, 15250-7954, 202/512-1800. Fax: 202/512-1262. On the Web, go to www.access.gpo.gov.

In Clark County, Nevada, NEA member Eddie Giron (white shirt) trains new custodians in working with hazardous materials, safety regulations, and "team cleaning."

Geri Kodey

ESP Keeping Schools Running



Jose Villegas

Want advice on the best way to set up a computer network at your school? A new report from the Department of Education can help. See below for Web address.

Nurse Fellowship Program

Each July, approximately 30 school nurses from around the country, including many NEA members, travel to New Jersey to participate in an intensive training program on drug and alcohol abuse prevention, early intervention methods, and treatment.

The Johnson & Johnson Live for Life School Nurse Fellowship Program is a joint effort of Johnson & Johnson and Rutgers University's Center of Alcohol Studies.

Upon completing the program, graduates are eligible to submit a proposal for a $1,000 grant to implement a specific substance abuse program in their schools.

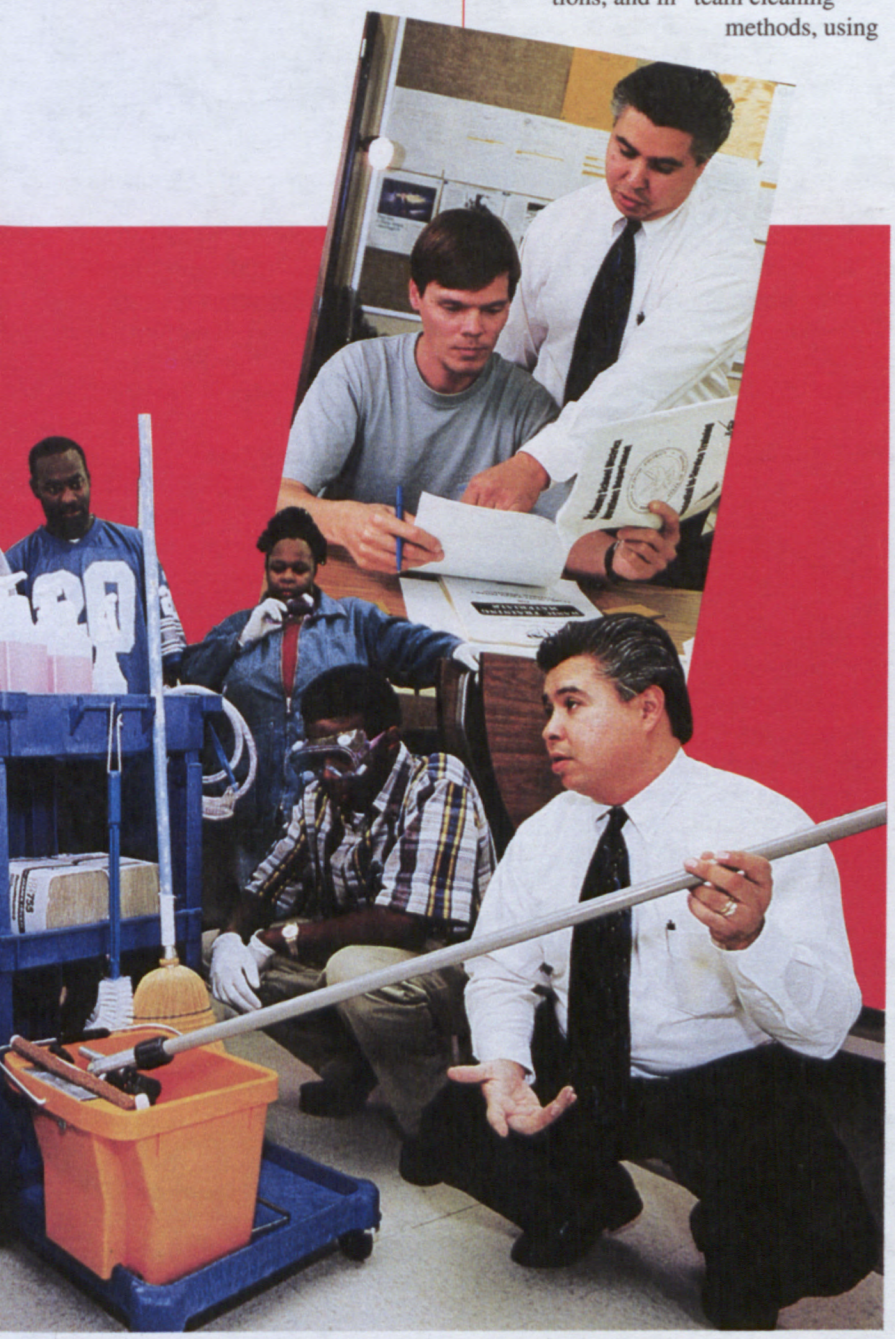
For more information, contact Susan Moran, Corporate Communications, Johnson & Johnson, 1 Johnson & Johnson Plaza WT-213, New Brunswick, NJ 08933, 732/524-3361.

Embracing Change

"We always resist change, but people who are open to change will be successful. We need to keep up with technology, even in custodial work."

So says custodial trainer Eddie Giron, an NEA member in Clark County, Nevada.

Giron, a former head custodian, trains new custodians in working with hazardous materials, OSHA regulations, and in "team cleaning" methods, using an eight-hour lesson plan he designed himself. He then follows up on the training in 57 work sites around the school district, helping custodians with their job problems.



Team cleaning is a method of dividing jobs among team members with the goal of increasing efficiency.

Some school districts have used team cleaning as a pretext for job cuts, but Giron says that, when used properly, the team approach can allow custodians to incorporate the latest technology in their work and do a better and more cost-effective job than outside contractors.

Giron's bottom line? "We've got to learn the technology or we'll lose the positions."

An active leader in his local Association, Giron says he'd be glad to share his resources on team cleaning and custodial work flow with other Association members. Contact him at work at 4260 Eucalyptus Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89121. E-mail: Eddie_A._Giron@aspen.interact.k12.nv.us.

Ready for Technology?

Is your school planning to set up a computer network for student or staff use? *Technology @ your fingertips*, a report from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) can help.

This 102-page non-technical publication describes how to determine and implement the best technology solutions from your school. The report may be downloaded (in PDF format) from the NCES Web site at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98293.pdf.

You can buy a print copy for $9.50 from the Government Printing Office. Contact: New Orders, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954, 202/512-1800.

Custodian's Closet

There are "Chemical Skeletons in Custodians' Closets," according to an article in the June 1998 issue of *Cleaning and Maintenance Management* magazine. Some disinfectant products contain unregistered pesticides, the article explains, while other products are registered, but ineffective.

You can read the article, which provides names of some of the products in question, in the CMM Online Web site, at http://cmmonline.com.

Besides magazine articles, the site also contains information on new products, a buyers guide, classifieds, an online Bulletin Board, and an E-mail forum. Registration (free) is required to access much of the site.

Member-to-Member

Are you a custodian interested in team cleaning? Or a paraeducator who wants to find out about use of school district training funds?

Discussion about these and many other questions have appeared recently on NEA's E-mail discussion list for ESP members. To subscribe—it's free—send an E-mail to LYRIS@LIST.NEA.ORG, leave the subject line blank, and put SUBSCRIBE ESP in the body of the message.

Got Answers?

Can you help your colleagues deal with winter's challenges?

- When kids tramp into school, bringing mud, slush, and road salt with them, how do you prevent school buildings from becoming a mess?
- Winter driving brings extra challenges. What can you tell kids, parents, and other drivers to help make sure kids are safe, even in stormy weather?
- What special measures can school support employees take to help kids stay healthy in the winter?

ESP Extra will print some of your responses in a future issue. To send in your ideas, write to ESP Feedback, NEA Publishing, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Send E-mail to ESPInput@list.nea.org.

Extra Special People

Special ed assistant **Cecilia Pitcher** recently became an American citizen, but she hasn't forgotten that ethnic diversity is what makes America so special.

Pitcher, who works at Pocono Mountain High School in Pennsylvania, helps run a "Volunteers for Understanding" workshop that breaks down racial/cultural barriers and stereotypes.

On top of that, this native of Ecuador has put together a student Latino dance group that has performed on TV, in front of Girl Scouts, and even at an army depot.

Pitcher, who received an award from her district for promoting multicultural understanding, is equally active right in her own classroom.

"Once a week for a few months, we go and help the Life Skills students when they go on outings, " Pitcher says. "We also help in the Special Olympics, and there are times we help kindergarten students with reading, math, and projects."

With support from his church in Harford County, Maryland, NEA member **Josh Barmer** founded and directs the Copley Kids Program. Its goal: to "foster resiliency by teaching and encouraging basic fundamentals of good work ethics and academic performance."

Part of the program gives kids 14 and older "odd jobs," like painting fences and removing tree stumps.

Chris Hartlove

NEA member Josh Barmer

Another offers students homework assistance, tutoring, and computer instruction —plus snacks and a small stipend for successful study.

"We have many kids who are now making the honor roll for the first time ever," says Barmer. "And parents say that student behavior has improved in school and at home."

Maureen Lawrence, a student at the Pinellas (Florida) Technical Education Center, was "at risk" of dropping out before ESP **Trudy Baker** got into some speechmaking with her.

Baker, an attendance progress assistant at PTEC-Clearwater, served as Lawrence's coach and mentor in a speech contest sponsored by the Florida affiliate of the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America.

Lawrence won—and went on to place second in the statewide match. Last summer, this dropout candidate graduated and joined the Marines.

As student activity coordinator at Kentucky's Madisonville Community College, **Sue Kyle** gets to make lots of connections.

Using contacts at the Hopkins County Department of Commerce and the local Democratic Women's Club, Kyle has brought in corporate donors for door prizes and refreshments at student events, and even arranged for a group of college students to meet the governor.

"I introduce students to the real world," Kyle stresses, "and try to help them in any way I can." That support can include finding child care and financial aid, without which many students would have to leave school.

Mary Hobbs, a library assistant at Blue Mountain Union School in Vermont, has played a key role in integrating the Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Red Clover Book Award programs into the school's language arts program.

Hobbs was responsible for much of the library's conversion to an automated circulation system and is currently responsible for maintaining its database. And she's now helping introduce the school community to the wonders of the Internet.

Do your job well and folks tend to notice. **Lisa Hudson,** a third grade teaching assistant and substitute bus driver in Sampson County, North Carolina, is so highly regarded that fourth and fifth grade teachers without assistants frequently call on her for help—with materials preparation, bulletin boards, school projects, and classroom monitoring.

Says fifth grade teacher Tammie Page: "Lisa has spent many extra hours after school to help a teacher or finish a job she started. Her dedication is phenomenal. "

Hudson, a single parent, is active in her community and church. "She also serves as an Association rep in my school," notes Page, "and continues to organize and promote ESP membership in my NEA local affiliate."

Ken Blevins

North Carolina teaching assistant Lisa Hudson

Want to recognize an ESP member doing quality work with kids in your school or community? Send all the details, along with that individual's name, job title, and town or school district—plus your name and phone number—to ESPInput@list.nea.org or Fax to ESP Extra at 202/822-7206.

Question of the Month

Should Seat Belts Be Mandatory on School Buses?

The following answers appeared on the NEA ESP Listserv. To join lively listserv discussions like this, send E-mail to Lyris@list.nea.org with this message: subscribe esp.

"Seat belts should be mandatory on buses. My son has a bus driver who slams on the brakes when she misses her stop to pick up the children. If my son and the other children didn't have seat belts on, they would be all over the bus."

—Lee Flanagan, head custodian
Plainfield, New Jersey

"In my district, special needs buses are equipped with seat belts. The drivers have an aide to tend to the children's needs, help them control their behavior, and keep them safe. This seems to meet the needs of students, drivers, and parents.

"As for my personal opinion, I would hope that seat belts for every student would not be mandated. Other drivers I've spoken with agree."

—Denise Hacker, bus driver
Fallsington, Pennsylvania

"I feel strongly that every bus should have a monitor so that bus drivers can do their job, which is to drive our children safely to and from school.

"What's the answer to the seat belt question? One solution: have a single device at the bus driver's seat that controls all the seat belts. But that costs money, and we all know that's something our school systems keep claiming they have very little of."

—Jeanette Martinez, educational assistant, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina

"As a recess aide, part of my job includes loading the students in our elementary school onto the buses at the end of the day. Our kindergartners are more than capable of using seat belts.

"I would like to see a seat belt law in effect. I realize drivers have a tough time seeing to it that students keep these belts on. But if drivers don't back down on their demands to follow the rules, wearing seat belts will ultimately become standard procedure on school buses."

—Marianne Pavie, recess aide
Bucks County, Pennsylvania

"I don't believe in a seat belt law. If there was ever a fire, I would never be able to get 42 little kindergarten kids out safely. It takes only three minutes for a bus to burn to the ground."

—Bonnie Chalfant, bus driver
Gloucester Township, New Jersey

"I am president of a large ESP unit in Michigan made up of all ESP classifications, including bus drivers. And I have never met a single driver who supports seat belts on buses.

"School bus drivers are perhaps the most undervalued school personnel in our school family. I could only compare them—in terms of real value, worth, and responsibility—to airline pilots.

"It's worthless to poll non-drivers —people who have no clue as to the reality of driving a school bus—on the value of seat belts.

"Legislation that mandates a seat for every child on a bus would do more for real school safety than seat belts could ever hope to do."

—Karl Bell, custodian
Southfield, Michigan

Got an Answer?

What can you do to get more respect from your co-workers?

Send your reply, along with your name, job title, and town or school district, to ESPInput@list.nea.org or Fax it to ESP Extra at 202/822-7206.

Rights Watch

The Court Rules on Harassment

Students who are victims of sexual harassment will have a tough time winning damages from the school district.

The Supreme Court says that—in most cases—students sexually harassed by teachers can't hold the school district liable. Next on the Court's docket: student-on-student sexual harassment.

In a landmark decision last June, a sharply divided Supreme Court ruled that students who are sexually harassed by teachers can rarely force the school to pay damages.

To win, students will have to prove that a school official with the authority to stop the harassment actually knew about it, but chose to ignore it.

Writing for the 5-4 majority in *Gebser* v. *Lago Vista Independent School District*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor conceded that "a student suffers extraordinary harm when subjected to sexual harassment and abuse by a teacher." But, she added, the school shouldn't be made to pay absent "actual notice and deliberate indifference."

In a strong dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens complained that the majority "ranks protection of the school district's purse above the protection of immature high school students."

"Few plaintiffs," he added, "will be able to recover damages under this exceedingly high standard."

Women's rights advocates also condemned the decision, arguing that it encourages school officials to bury their heads in the sand.

"They are essentially saying 'ignorance is bliss,'" says Paula Pearlman, an attorney with the California Women's Law Center.

"A damage verdict is what causes school districts to sit up and take notice," adds Martha Davis, legal director for the NOW Legal Defense Fund. "This [ruling] takes away the incentive for them to do something about the problem."

"Schools can't protect students from everything," counters Virginia Collier, who was superintendent of the Lago Vista (Texas) School District when it was sued.

As previously reported in the Rights Watch column (April 1998), Alida Gebser was a 14-year-old high school freshman when her social studies teacher, Frank Waldrip, allegedly pursued and enticed her into a sexual relationship.

After the police discovered the two engaged in sex, Waldrip was fired, decertified, and jailed.

Gebser then sued the Lago Vista Independent School District under Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, by schools that receive federal funds.

In a friend-of-the-court brief, NEA argued that schools usually should be held liable in these kinds of cases—except where the school has in place a comprehensive and effective program to prevent and remedy sexual harassment.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg adopted this position in a dissenting opinion joined by Justices David Souter and Stephen Breyer.

NEA is now working with other organizations on federal legislation to overturn *Gebser*.

Soon after the Court's decision, Education Secretary Richard Riley issued a strong statement noting that, even though the *Gebser* decision limited a student's ability to recover damages, it did not alter the department's position that this sort of harassment violates Title IX.

In a related case, the Supreme Court last October agreed to decide whether schools can be held liable under Title IX for failing to stop student-on-student sexual harassment.

The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in *Davis* v. *Monroe County Board of Education* last year that schools have no legal duty to stop peer harassment.

Fifth grader LaShonda Davis claims that school officials in Monroe County, Georgia, did nothing to stop a five-month "barrage of sexual harassment and abuse" at the hands of a classmate, despite her repeated complaints.

The harasser allegedly rubbed up against her, repeatedly tried to grab her breasts and genital area, and asked her for sex.

Davis and her mother eventually swore out a criminal warrant, and the perpetrator pled guilty to sexual battery. They then sued the school district under Title IX.

The 11th Circuit said that school districts can't be held liable for peer sexual harassment, even when school officials actually know about the harassment and choose to ignore it.

The court reasoned that because the text of Title IX itself doesn't explicitly say that schools can be sued for peer harassment, Congress didn't give school districts adequate notice that their receipt of federal funds could lead to this kind of liability.

A decision by the Supreme Court in *Davis* is expected by June.

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Racial Harassment And Huck Finn

A federal appeals court has rejected efforts by an African-American parent to ban *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the required reading list of a Tempe, Arizona, high school.

In the same case, the court also ruled that schools can be sued for failing to respond adequately to complaints of student-on-student racial harassment.

Kathy Monteiro claimed that her daughter "suffered psychological injuries" when required to read Twain's novel and William Faulkner's story, *A Rose for Emily*. Both use an obscene racial epithet.

"No child," Monteiro argued, "should have to struggle through a required reading assignment in which members of his or her race are described in such a dehumanizing and disrespectful way."

But in October the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals refused to recognize her claim in *Monteiro* v. *Tempe Union High School District*. To ban the works, the court said, would violate students' First Amendment rights to receive information.

Such a ruling, the court added, would have "a significant chilling effect" on a district's willingness to assign books with themes or passages that might offend. "A necessary component of any education is learning to think critically about offensive ideas," the court said.

Monteiro also claimed that her child and others were subjected to a racially hostile environment because white students repeatedly called them by the racial epithet that appeared in the books, and graffiti with the insult appeared on school walls.

The court ruled that Monteiro can recover damages from the district if she can show that school officials knew there was a racially hostile environment and failed to take "reasonable steps" to end it.

Its reasoning: Title VI—the law prohibiting racial discrimination by federally funded schools—requires schools to provide a learning environment free of racial harassment.

This is the first appellate decision recognizing a student's right to sue a school for failing to remedy student-on-student racial harassment And it conflicts with the 11th Circuit's *Davis* case (see main story).

The case is back in district court for a trial on the damages issue.

Bits & Bytes

Bytes for Beginners

When I upgraded my Web browser, I lost all of my old bookmarks! Next time I upgrade, how can I save my bookmarks?

When you have both Netscape and Microsoft Explorer on the same computer, or when you're updating a really old version of Netscape, you can run into problems preserving Bookmarks/Favorites.

The safest way to save bookmark files is to download and use one of the many shareware programs that allow you to create bookmark files that work independently of any browser. These nifty utilities also let you share the same bookmark file between Netscape 3.0/4.0 and Internet Explorer.

Two useful Windows 95/98-based shareware utilities are:

■ Bookmark Importer 1.1—www.webobj.com/bookmark

■ Acquire—www.gttech.com/acquire.htm

Know of any software to help kindergartners with letter recognition?

Here are two that K-2 educators tell us they like:

■ Kid Pix 2 by Broderbund Software (www.broderbund.com) speaks the names of the letters and numbers as they are selected.

■ Sesame Street Get Set for Kindergarten by Creative Wonders (www.beyond.com/PKIN779616/prod.htm) has features tailored to help beginning learners with letter recognition.

Be aware: Using software tools for drill-and-practice may not be the best approach for introducing students to new skills. In fact, first steps to helping kids develop letter recognition might be best achieved away from the computer.

For lesson plan ideas, visit NEA's Gateway to Education Materials (www.nea.org/gem) and search on "letter recognition" for kindergarten students.

Have ideas, comments, or questions about technology? You can E-mail webeditor@dear.nea.org or write to Dear Webeditor, NEA Center for Education Technology, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Check out www.nea.org/cet for more questions from beginners and answers from the experts.

My favorite Web site . . .

"My Hero (www.myhero.com) was a great resource for researching our topic, Heroes: People Who Made a Difference. This site even has a section featuring teacher heroes!"

Gloria Brown, grade 4/5 talented and gifted teacher, Wolcott, Connecticut

Wired Classroom

Lessons in Compassion

** Updated daily! Click Reload or Refresh if needed.
How To Love Your Dog
(for kids only)
If you love dogs, you're in the right place! Join us, as three very special collies take you on some very exciting tours. If you're ready to embark on a great adventure, then choose your tour and let's begin!
Thanksgiving is coming! Click on the turkey !

My Web site, "How To Love Your Dog—A Kid's Guide to Dog Care" (www.howtoloveyourdog.com), is an educational, interactive site for kids and includes lessons that emphasize language arts.

The lessons are a continuation of humane education lessons I taught in my classroom. For many years, my collies, who are registered therapy dogs, accompanied me to school and helped kids learn about compassion, commitment, and responsibility.

Kids can send their ideas, stories, and opinions to the Web site, as well as read submissions from children around the world.

After 23 years in elementary classrooms, I recently had to leave teaching due to an illness. Through my Web site, I'm able to continue my teaching and contact with kids. In fact, I can reach many more kids now!

Not long ago, students from a seventh grade class in Missouri found the site, and every child wrote something for me to post online. Reaching kids through school and home is a goal I'm working toward.

Jan Wall
San Diego, California

National Parks Web Pages

My students use the Internet to research information about America's National Parks and then create personal Web pages to display their maps, drawings, and reports. We take advantage of Web site hosting offered by Geocities to get our work onto the World Wide Web.

The students organize their research into clear, well-written reports with vital information about the parks' history, geology, flora and fauna, and special features. They use keyboarding and word processing skills to produce their Web pages with ClarisWorks. The students learn to make links from their pages to their specific park's Web pages, and I show them how to put images in their Web pages.

Take a look at our Web pages at www.geocities.com/Athens/5010/index.html.

Paul J. Wigowsky
Fifth grade teacher
Hubbard, Oregon

Signaling for Help

Every station in our computer lab has a bright yellow Solo plastic cup for the students to use if they have questions. When they need the teacher, they simply place their cup on top of their monitor. I survey the room and can tell right away if something I explained was understood. I walk to the student, answer the question, and then put the cup down.

It helps a lot!

Mary Grindstaff
Technology instructor
Linton, Indiana

Virtual Tour Guides

To give my students some awareness of the modern perspective, I "hire" them to be tour guides to the foreign countries that we study throughout the year as ancient civilizations.

Students have to:

■ Color the seven continents and outline their country on a world map.

■ Create a map of their country including major cities, geographical features, and bordering countries. Many use Encarta Virtual Globe as a resource.

■ Create a travel poster for their country. Many get information and pictures from encyclopedia CD-ROMs and the Internet.

■ Produce a travel brochure or other form of itinerary, such as a travel magazine, using Microsoft Publisher.

■ Find a news item about their country and analyze its impact on tourism. We use a magazine CD-ROM our school library subscribes to, as well as many Internet sources.

■ Present a sales pitch to get others to visit their country. Some produce radio or TV commercials, while others create TV talk shows. After the students grade each other, we use Microsoft Excel to calculate scores.

Kay Lehmann
Eighth grade social studies teacher
Walla Walla, Washington

*Want a weekly tip on using technology? Subscribe to the Wired Classroom E-mail list. Just send an E-mail to **join-etoolsweekly@list.nea.org** (no subject or message needed).*

My favorite software . . .

"Kid Pix Studio Deluxe (Broderbund, 800/567-2610, $29.95) is great for elementary students. We use it to introduce databases and create summer postcards and electronic book reports."

Harry Brennan, K-5 technology teacher, Old Bridge, New Jersey

Friendly User

Fear of Reading? Nevermore!

This teacher wants to share his solution for helping kids crack the classics.

John Suchocki

Microsoft 1998 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Al Baggetta gets beyond using computers just to help students with writing skills. "I want to get kids to concentrate more on their reading," he says.

Who:
Al Baggetta, tenth grade English teacher, Agawam High School, Agawam, Massachusetts

E-mail:
baggetta@massed.net

Inspiration:
Many students find classics like *Beowulf* or *The Raven* alarming—but it's not Grendel or the creepy tap-tap-tapping that scares them. It's all that reading.

"I've often felt if literature were taken in smaller doses, it would be more understandable," Baggetta says.

Thinking about how to break down the classics into more digestible bits, he turned to an "art form" that has no problem engaging teens.

"When kids play video games, the intensity is unbelievable. You could drop a bomb right next to them, and they wouldn't notice," Baggetta says. "I thought it would be great if you could do the same thing with literature."

So Baggetta, a whiz at using the programming language Visual Basic, created Baggetta_Ware, interactive software that leads kids through *Julius Caesar, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Beowulf,* and *The Raven*.

The software displays small segments of the literary work and then asks students to type in their answers to questions on character, plot, and setting. The program immediately scores students' responses before moving on to the next section of the work.

For instance, Baggetta's *Beowulf: The Adventure* begins by presenting the poem's opening stanza and firing off the first of 90 questions, "What prize did the Danish heroes and kings fight for?"

Students get one chance to answer each question, and they'd better be careful. Spelling and punctuation errors result in a wrong answer—and a lower score.

"They read *Beowulf* like they never have before, because they have to find the answer to that question," Baggetta says.

Lesson:
After Baggetta introduces a literary work and talks students through the vocabulary, they head to the school's computer lab for a few days to work through the program.

Baggetta pairs up students to answer questions cooperatively—and to solve the problem of fitting 30 kids in a 20-station lab.

Back in class, students discuss the most troublesome questions. Since they've been using the programs, Baggetta says, they seem to better comprehend what they've read.

"They're learning the importance of reading and of paying very careful attention to what they're reading," he says.

Click:
Baggetta thinks his program bridges the gap between computer games that "give kids tremendous hand-eye coordination and nothing else"—and prepackaged literature software that merely asks kids to do their reading on a computer screen instead of the printed page.

"It's the interactivity that really makes this work," he says.

For More Information

Baggetta recently set up a Web site to share his software with other educators—for free. You'll need a computer equipped with Windows 95 or 98 to run the programs.

Just go to www.angelfire.com/ak/english10/teachers.html to see what's available and to request to have software E-mailed to you.

Or send your request, along with two blank 3½" discs and $1 to cover postage, to Baggetta at 177 Adams St., Agawam, MA 01001.

New & Noteworthy

Geography Standards
The National Geographic Society and MCI Worldcom have collaborated to sponsor and build Xpeditions, a Web site on geography standards.

Go to www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions to find all 18 national geography standards, along with sample lesson plans. More than 1,800 maps that can be printed as black-line masters are available as well.

The site also features Xpedition Hall, an interactive, virtual museum where switches, dials, and levers can be manipulated.

If Life Gives You Lemons
Students studying economics can learn from "Lemonade Stand," an online economics simulation, at www.littlejason.com/lemonade. Students will enjoy tackling rental, production, and advertising costs to try to make a profit.

Math and Science Help
StudyWorks 2, new from MathSoft, is math and science software designed for high school and college students.

StudyWorks explains math and science concepts, then provides guided exercises and practice problems. Students can integrate equations, calculations, graphs, and text on an interactive worksheet.

The single-user price for StudyWorks for schools is $99.95. StudyWorks is available from educational software catalogs and MathSoft resellers. Lab and site licenses are available directly from MathSoft, 800/628-4223.

Talk to Us

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to **wiredclassroom@list.nea.org**.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to **myfavoritetech@list.nea.org**.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

CELEBRATE READ ACROSS AMERICA ON MARCH 2, 1999

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http://www.nea.org/readacross/catalogue.html

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- 1 Hat
- 1 Poster
- 5 Buttons
- 30 Stickers
- 30 Color Bookmarks
- Free Certificate of Participation Photocopy Master

SCHOOL SPECIAL — $49.95

- 3 Hats
- 5 Posters
- 25 Buttons
- 500 Stickers
- Free Organizing Pamphlet, Black-and-White Bookmark Photocopy Master, and Certificate of Participation Photocopy Master

COMMUNITY SPECIAL — $99.95

- 10 Hats
- 10 Posters
- 25 Buttons
- 500 Stickers
- Bonus 1998 Read Across America Highlights Videotape
- Free Organizing Pamphlet, Black-and-White Bookmark Photocopy Master, and Certificate of Participation Photocopy Master

☛ **Buy two specials and get shipping and handling for free!**

ITEM	QTY	PRICE	
Teacher and ESP Special		$24.95	
School Special		$49.95	
Community Special		$99.95	
Shipping and Handling	XXX	$ 5.00	

(Hawaii and Alaska may require extra charges.)

Grand Total $_____

- Mail this form to:
  Read Across America
  Morrissey Sales
  22 West Church St.
  Blackwood, New Jersey 08012
- Or fax it to **1 (609) 227-6801**
- Or call toll free **1 (800) 736-8018**

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Organization _____
Address _____
_____
Phone Number _____
Visa _____ Mastercard _____
Credit Card Number _____
Expiration Date _____
Signature _____
Check No. _____ Enclosed (NEA Members Only)

Heads Up!

TV Tips

Class of 2000 Snapshots

CBS, airing once a week through August 1999. From CBS News, these one-minute features highlight accomplishments of high school students who will graduate in the year 2000. The spots will alternate each week between commercial breaks of "CBS News 48 Hours" and the "JAG" series. For free study guides, check the Web at www.kidsnet.org.

ZOOM

PBS, premieres Monday, January 5, check local listings. This popular kids-only series from the 1970s is back and features experiments, plays, poems, films, and games sent in by young viewers. For a free guide that includes activities, resources, and more, write to ZOOMsci Guide, WGBH Educational Print & Outreach, 125 Western Ave., Boston, MA 02134.

Selma, Lord Selma

ABC, Sunday, January 17, 7-9 p.m. ET, check local listings. This two-hour "Wonderful World of Disney" film tells the true story of eight-year-old Sheyann Webb and nine-year-old Rachel West, whose march with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the winter of 1965 in Selma, Alabama, changed their lives. For a free classroom discussion guide, call the ABC Classroom Connection, 800/647-4ABC or visit the Web site at www.abcclassroom.com.

A&E Classroom: Titanic

A&E, Monday-Thursday, January 25-28, 7-8 a.m. ET. This four-part series looks at the history of this famous ship and its passengers, using interviews with survivors, stills, and newsreel footage. Check the Web at www.AandE.com for an online study guide. Call 800/423-1212 for home video availability.

So Weird

Disney Channel, premiering this month, check local listings. This new half-hour series chronicles the adventures of a traveling family, including 13-year-old Fi Phillips, a girl fascinated by the mysteries of the paranormal. Each episode opens with a short documentary describing strange events that may or may not have taken place.

Fight for Your Rights: Take a Stand Against Violence

MTV, public service campaign begins this month. MTV and the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education have joined together to raise awareness and offer solutions to the problems of youth violence in schools and neighborhoods.

The three themes of this public service campaign are violence in schools, violence in the streets, and sexual violence. Programming specials and public service announcements will air on MTV throughout the year. Contact your local cable operator for a free youth action guide.

For Kids Sake! Radio

National Public Radio, check local listings. This weekly radio program challenges parents, grandparents, and teachers to look at what's working to improve children's lives. Originating from WCAL in Northfield, Minnesota, the one-hour show features issues such as child care, commentary by children and teens, and a family story segment called "The Talking Rainbow."

Learn & Live

PBS, Check local listings. Hosted by Robin Williams, this one-hour special showcases innovative schools across the country and demonstrates what public education can achieve when students are challenged, have access to interactive technologies, and benefit from family and community involvement. To purchase the video and 300-page companion guide, call the George Lucas Educational Foundation at 888/475-4371 or check the Web at www.glef.org.

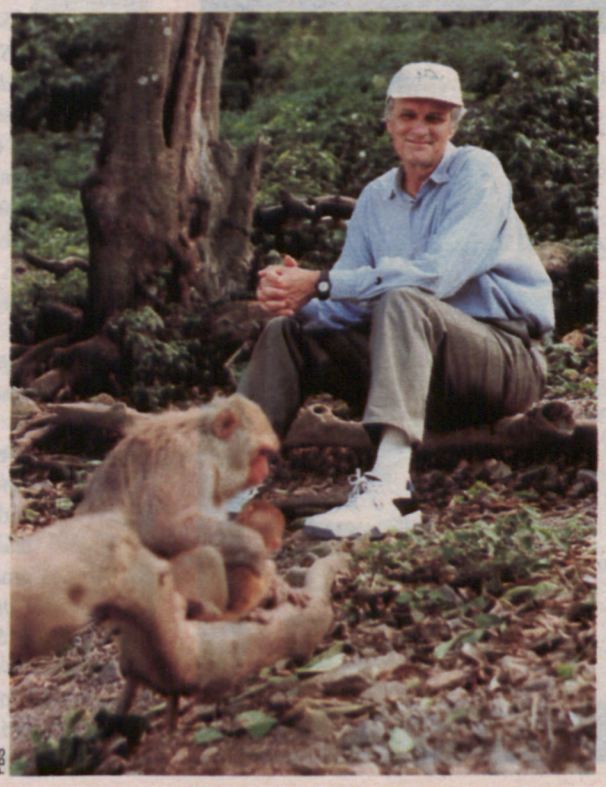
NOGGIN

Nickelodeon and Children's Television Workshop have teamed to launch this 24-hour channel as the first educational television network for kids between the ages of 2 and 14.

The NOGGIN schedule will include the partners' signature educational series "Sesame Street" and "Blue's Clues," plus award-winning programs such as "Electric Company," "3-2-1 Contact," and "Ghostwriter" from CTW and "Gullah Gullah Island" and "Nick News" from Nickelodeon. (Premiere episodes of "Sesame Street" and "Blue's Clues" will continue to air on PBS and Nickelodeon.)

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information on children's shows, check out the KIDSNET Web site at www.kidsnet.org.

Animal Einsteins



PBS

PBS, Wednesday, January 20, 8-9 p.m. ET, check local listings. This "Scientific American Frontiers" special examines the latest studies of birds, sea lions, chimps, and tamarins. Host Alan Alda travels to several universities to take part in experiments proving just how smart animals are—including monkeys who understand gravity and sea lions who use sign language.

Free teaching guides for grades 5-12 are available. Call 800/315-5010 or go to the Web site at www.pbs.org/saf.

school stories

***School Stories* will no longer appear on The Learning Channel, but you can can still find this insider view of America's schools on video through the NEA Professional Library. Here's a sampling of the videos available.**

If Teachers Fail... Fix or Fire?
Teachers in Columbus, Ohio, are policing their own ranks with a program called Peer Assistance and Review. See how veteran teachers are helping some of their troubled peers work out problems, or adjust to first-year difficulties. Stock #7615-X-00-F, $16.95.

Technology: Hype or Hope
Is all the time and expense of wiring schools and classrooms to the Internet worth the effort? A Princeton, New Jersey, school district offers educators' answers. Stock #7614-1-00-F, $16.95.

The Struggle for Safety
In Long Beach, California, it's an everyday struggle to keep the influence of gangs out of the hallways and schoolyard. Take a look at some of the measures school employees there use to keep students and schools safe. Stock #7612-5-00-F, $19.95.

High-Stakes Testing
Find out how the city of Milwaukee turned failure—only 21 percent of students had passed the high-stakes math test the first time around—into a stirring success, as more than 90 percent of seniors passed the test by the end of the year. A lesson in setting high standards. Stock #7618-4-00-F, $16.95.

Second-Chance High
At Hamilton Terrace Learning Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, expelled students mix with dropouts, students with criminal records, even welfare recipients back in school to qualify for their checks. But at Hamilton, everyone is learning and succeeding. Stock #7611-7-00-F, $19.95.

To order any of these videos or videos of other School Stories *episodes, call 800/229-2400.*

Heads Up

Free or Inexpensive

Stress Management

Have too much stress to take the time to read a stress management book? Try *Inspiring Tranquility: Stress Management and Learning Styles in the Inclusive Classroom*. Written by a teacher and a physical therapist, this book combines brain research, learning styles, and strategies that aim to initiate the "relaxation response" in stressful classroom situations. NEA member price: $10.95 plus s&h. Stock #2592-6-00-FF. Contact the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

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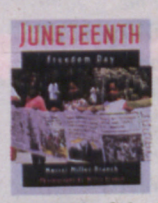
Advice for New Teachers

Forty-five veteran K-12 teachers from across the country lend expert advice to rookies in the *New Teachers Handbook*. The newly updated version deals with classroom management, teaching techniques, working with parents, and more. $14, bulk prices available. Call IMPACT II-The Teachers Network at 212/966-5582. Fax: 212/941-1787. On the Web: www.teachnet.org.

Poetry Please

In *Pass the Poetry Please!*, author Lee Bennett Hopkins suggests creative ways to use nursery rhymes, jump-rope jingles, and songs to enhance poetry lessons. Includes biographies of 24 contemporary children's poets. $13.95 plus $2.75 s&h and your state's sales tax. Contact HarperCollins Publishers, Direct Mail Department, P.O. Box 588, Dumore, PA 18512, 800/242-7737. On the Web: www.harpercollins.com.



Freedom Day

Juneteenth, Freedom Day explains the holiday commemorating the day in 1865 when Black Texans first learned of the Emancipation Proclamation. Historical background, plus tips on how to organize your own Juneteenth celebration. $15.99 plus $2.75 s&h, plus tax. Stock #0-525-65222-1. Call Cobblehill Books, 800/253-6476.

Math Games

Math Games for Middle School: Challenges and Skill Builders for Students at Every Level presents a wide array of math topics in the entertaining and challenging teaching style of the late Mario Salvadori, internationally known engineer, architect, and public school teacher. $16.95 plus $5 s&h. Contact Independent Publishers Group, 814 N. Franklin St., Chicago, IL 60610, 800/888-4741. Send E-mail to jpgbook@mcs.com.

First Day of School

Know someone who's about to become a new teacher? Give them a great graduation gift—NEA's *Countdown to the First Day of School*, a must-have checklist for every new elementary teacher. NEA member price: $4.50 plus s&h. Stock #2150-9-00-FF. Call NEA's Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

Heads Up

Rain Forest Exploration

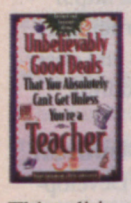
Explore the deep trenches and wildlife of the Congo River Basin in Central Africa with a team of scientists, artists, and filmmakers from the American Museum of Natural History. Check out *Inside the Dzanga-Sangha Rain Forest,* for kids ages 13 and up. $12.95 plus $3 s&h. Contact Workman Publishing, 708 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, 212/254-5900. Fax: 212/254-8098. On the Web: www.workman.com.

Exploring Oceans

A practical and useful tool for kids ages 8-12, *Exploring the Oceans* is filled with hands-on activities that help kids explore oceanography and the ecosystem. The book aims to help students, teachers, and parents understand and appreciate the importance of sea life. $16.95 plus $4 s&h. Contact Fulcrum Publishing at 800/992-2908 or 303/277-1623.

Honoring Native Americans

A new 24" by 36" poster from Yankee Ingenuities features photos of 12 prominent leaders from northern Native American tribes. Special NEA member price: $6 plus $2.75 s&h. Contact Yankee Ingenuities, Ltd., P.O. Box 7305, McLean, VA 22106, 703/573-8161. Fax: 703/573-6940.



Bargains

Hot off the presses: the new edition of *Unbelievably Good Deals That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're a Teacher.* This edition is packed with bargains, plus tips on how to get free posters, science supplies, audiotapes, and more. $12.95 in bookstores. Contemporary Books, 847/679-5500.

Insect Facts

Do insects dream? Do bugs have emotions? Why do stink bugs stink? Get the answers in *Do Bees Sneeze?* For kids 8-12, this book explains how bugs live, mate, eat, and more. $17.95 plus $4 s&h. Fulcrum Publishing, 800/992-2908.

Hypermedia

An in-depth guide on enhancing research projects using hypermedia, *Hyperlearning* includes step-by-step instructions and research tips for students. $19.50 plus $3.50 s&h. Stenhouse Publishers, P.O. Box 360, York Harbor, ME 03911, 800/988-9812. On the Web: www.stenhouse.com.

Writing with Style

"Craft is the cauldron in which good writing is forged." *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8* includes 78 lesson plans for teachers who want to teach their students the craft of writing, not just the beginning and end—conceiving and correcting—of the process. $17.50 plus $3.50 s&h. Stenhouse Publishers, P.O. Box 360, York Harbor, ME 03911, 800/988-9812. On the Web: www.stenhouse.com.

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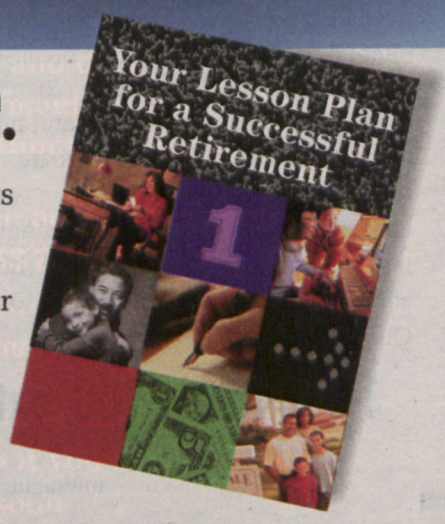

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Withdrawals made prior to age 59½ may be subject to a 10% tax penalty. Withdrawals may be restricted for contracts issued under the terms of a tax sheltered annuity. The Internal Revenue Service prohibits certain distributions attributable to salary reductions before the individual reaches age 59½, separates from service, dies or becomes disabled, or experiences a hardship as defined by the Code.

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VBNT0199

Heads Up

Events

Job Shadowing

On February 2, Groundhog Day, professionals around the country will see students in their "shadows." General Colin Powell predicts that up to half a million high school students will spend the day with mentors in their field of choice, as part of the second annual Groundhog Job Shadow Day.

Four organizations—America's Promise, the American Society of Association Executives, Junior Achievement, and School-to-Work—are sponsoring this year's event.

For more information, contact the National Groundhog Job Shadow Day Coalition, 909 N. Washington St. Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314, 703/535-3874 or 410/810-7910. On the Web: www.jobshadow.org.

Black History Month

In February, Americans will celebrate the last Black History Month of the 20th century. This year's theme: "The Legacy of African-American Leadership for the Present and the Future."

To help you plan activities, the Carter G. Woodson Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, Inc., will distribute a kit containing teaching tools, graphics, activities, biographical notes, and essays.

To order the kit for $49.95 (includes s&h), contact ASALH, 1407 14th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005, 202/667-2822. Fax: 202/387-9802. E-mail: asalh@earthlink.net.

Bird Count

Put your counting cap on. It's time for the Second Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. The National Audubon Society is counting on volunteers to collect data on the birds in their backyards, schoolyards, and local parks from February 19 to 22.

Last year, more than 14,000 volunteers took part. If you're interested in joining the fun, you'll find classroom materials, activities, and resources on the Bird Source Web site at http://birdsource.cornell.edu. Participants should send their numbers and observations to the same Web address.

African-American Children

The National Black Child Development Institute will hold a public policy conference on education in Washington, D.C., on March 4 and 5.

The conference theme: "Problems, Politics, and Progress: Addressing the Crisis in Education Facing African-American Children."

For details, contact NBCDI, 1023 15th St., N.W., Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005, 800/556-2234.

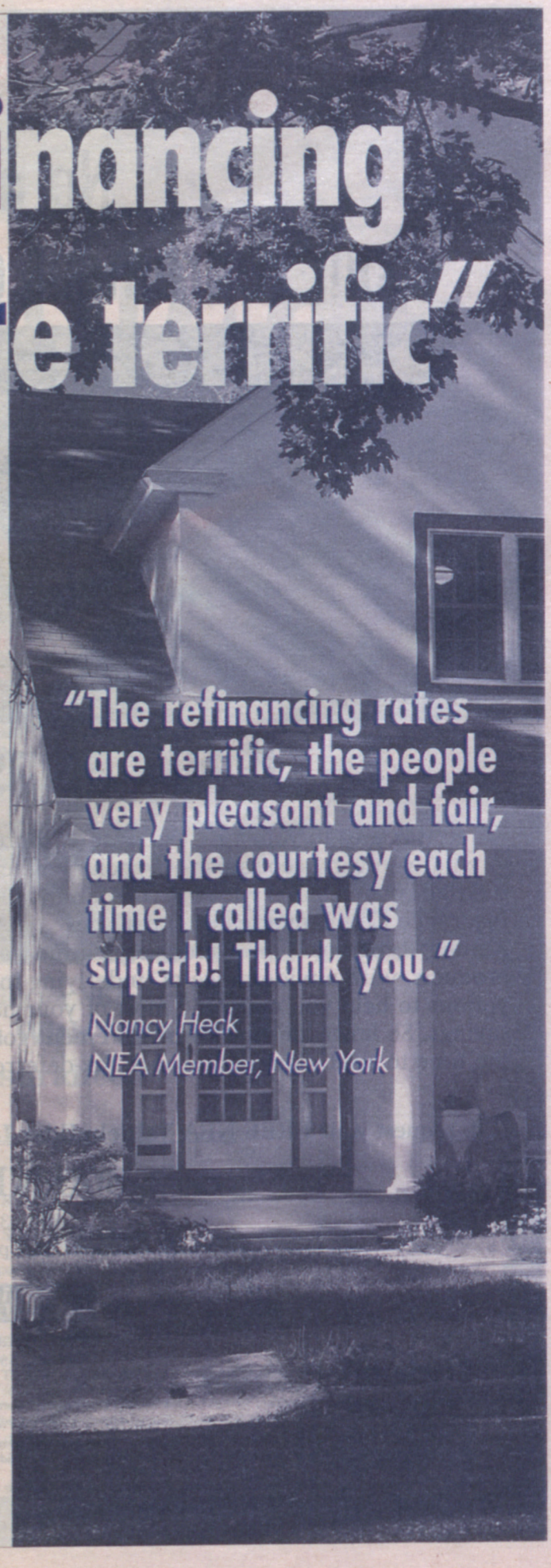
Grants

Student Needs

More professional development opportunities are available from NEA's National Foundation for the Improvement of Education.

NFIE awards grants of $1,000 to individual teachers, education support personnel, and higher ed faculty and staff for projects addressing student

"The refinancing rates are terrific"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NEA Member, New York

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Heads Up

needs. For guidelines, visit the NFIE Web site at www.nfie.org.

Awards

Physical Education

NEA member Karen Roesler is this year's National Physical Education Teacher of the Year. Roesler, a physical education teacher at Fargo South High School in North Dakota, received a similar award last spring from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

Witness News

New York teacher and NEA member Jeff Goldstein proudly stood by recently as his students accepted the 1998 ComputerWorld/Smithsonian Media, Arts, and Entertainment Award for their work in Panasonic's Kid Witness News video education program.

Community Service

The Bayer/NSF Award for Community Innovation rewards middle school students who use science and technology to better their community.

Winning teams receive a trip to Epcot,™ where they compete for $36,000 in savings bonds. The grand prize winner receives a $25,000 grant. Deadline: January 31.

For details, call 800/291-6020. On the Web: www. nsf.gov/bayer-nsf-award.htm.

Travel Scholarships

The American Council for International Studies is accepting applications from students in grades 9-12 for the second annual Travel Is Education awards. Awards will be given in two categories—art work and creative writing. All entries must be submitted by a sponsoring teacher. Deadline: June 30. For more information, contact Tessa Edick at 800/888-2247. On the Web: www.acis.com.

Opportunities

NASA Workshops

The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) have teamed up to offer K-12 teachers an all-expense paid, two-week workshop at a NASA center. Deadline: February 20.

For an application, call NSTA's Fax-on-Demand service at 888/400-6782, request document #581. On the Web: www.nsta.org/programs/new.htm.

Volunteering Abroad

Interested in humanitarian work in Africa? The nonprofit humanitarian organization Cross-Cultural Solutions recently launched a project in Ghana, West Africa. Volunteers will work for three weeks or more teaching English in village schools, helping women with small businesses, and doing other helpful tasks.

The program fee of $1,850 covers all expenses while in Ghana. Airfare is additional. For information, contact Cross-Cultural Solutions at 800/380-4777. On the Web, go to www.crossculturalsolutions.org.

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Heads Up

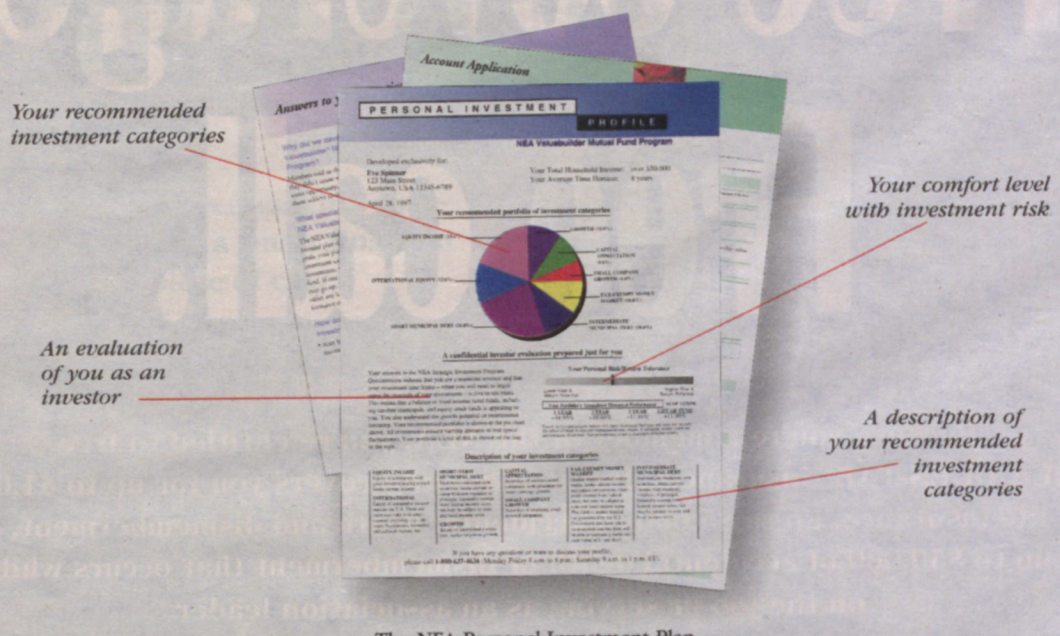
Teachers at Sea

Interested in spending the summer at sea? The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is offering teachers the chance to serve on research vessels that will examine fish populations, the impact of climactic events, and more.

The program is free, but teachers are responsible for paying their own transportation to the ships' departure points. Successful applicants can choose from several research missions, ranging from one to three weeks on the East, West, or Gulf coasts.

Deadline: March 8. For details, contact Wanda Campbell, NOAA Atlantic Marine Center, 439 York St., Norfolk, VA 23510, 757/441-6800. E-mail: wanda.campbell@noaa.gov.

Need a plan to help you invest in mutual funds?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An evaluation of you as an investor
Your comfort level with investment risk
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All you have to do to get started is answer a brief questionnaire. Your responses will be computer-analyzed**–free of charge–to develop a **Personal Investment Plan** that you can easily put into action. So don't wait. Call today for your free questionnaire. The sooner you get started, the sooner you'll help make your money work for you.

Call toll free, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET for your free questionnaire.

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MFNT0199

Contests

Young Inventors

The Craftsman/NSTA Young Inventors Awards contest offers up to $10,000 in savings bond awards to students in grades 4-6 who invent new tools or modify existing ones. For details, call 888/494-4994 or send E-mail to younginventors@nsta.org. Deadline: March 16.

Web Winners

New York Times

Based on the news and archives of the *New York Times* and enhanced by the latest interactive tools, *The Times Learning Network* brings world affairs to life for grade 6-12 teachers, students, and parents. Check it out at www.nytimes.com/learning.

USA Today

Welcome to USA TODAY Education's Web Site
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Your online gateway to the world of education
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Classroom focus on today's lead story

Not to be outdone, *USA Today* offers its own comprehensive education site full of news and activities for teachers, students, and parents alike. Take a look at http://education.usatoday.com.

Teachers Net

Connect with other teachers, enter a forum on middle schools, get the latest in education research and trends, and learn about curriculum changes. All of this at http://teachers.net.

Close-Up

The Close Up Foundation's Web site provides online civics resources, program information, and excellent resources. Go to www.closeup.org.

Women's History

The National Women's History Project's Web site provides information about individual women and women's experiences throughout American history. Call it up at www.NWHP.org.

In the Light Lane

No Grits, No Glory?

I dictated a definition of "epiphany" to my senior English class as a "sudden spiritual awakening, usually in a moment of crisis."

On their quizzes a week later, about half a dozen students defined it as a "southern spiritual awakening." I reassured them that even Yankees experience epiphanies—and I'm working on my enunciation.

Peggy Corbett
Canton, Georgia

I read a holiday book to my first grade library class that featured a picture of the Three Wise Men.

One boy said, "I know one gift they brought—gold."

When I asked about the other gifts, the students looked puzzled.

"The other two gifts begin with an F and an M," I hinted.

"I know!" a student said. "It was Frankenstein and Mountain Dew!"

Susan Goochey
Burwell, Nebraska

I spent several days helping Maria, a third grader in my ESL class, memorize and spell an English vocabulary list.

Maria worked very hard, and I was confident that she would ace the test. But I joked with her that if she didn't, "I'll just turn you upside down and shake you until the change falls out of your pockets!"

The next morning Maria and the principal appeared at my classroom door. The principal, grinning from ear to ear, asked Maria to tell again what Mrs. Cavanaugh would do if she didn't do well on the test.

Maria proudly replied, "She's going to shake me down and take all my money!"

Katherine Cavanaugh
Oak Grove, Virginia

During my first student teaching placement, we were discussing taxes. My cooperating teacher explained to our second graders that in Missouri, if they buy something that costs $1, the total is $1.06—and the six cents goes to the government.

One student asked very seriously, "How do they carry all of this change around?"

Kimberly Punshon
St. Louis, Missouri

My fourth graders and I were looking at our lunch menu to see what we were having. One student noticed that we had a holiday coming up the following week.

"Yeah," said another student, "we're off Monday for Milk Day."

He was referring to MLK Day, printed on the lunch menu calendar.

Shanon Melson
Riverdale, Georgia

In my ninth grade career exploration class, I asked the students to make a collage that represented the career of their choice.

I had to laugh when I came across the collage by a future mortician. The student had written "inbomb" for "embalm."

I told her I could just see the exploding bodies she would take care of.

Joanne Exline
Clay, West Virginia

One day I covered another bus driver's run. I was standing at my seat, wearing my mirrored sunglasses, as the children boarded the bus.

A fifth grade boy got on, took the first seat, and kept looking at me. Finally, as I was about to sit down, he asked, "Are you blind?"

Elaine Helfman
Winter Springs, Florida

During Show and Tell, one of my first graders said, "I about died when I was born."

"What happened to you?" I asked.

He replied, "My extension cord was wrapped around my neck."

When I started laughing, he became indignant.

"It's not funny," he protested. "I about died!"

Helen Johnson
Ogden, Utah

One of my first graders was in the restroom when the fire alarm went off. He was able to catch up to us as we left our classroom, but he was so frightened that he couldn't talk as we walked to our assigned spot.

He wasn't at a loss for words as we returned to our room, however.

His summary of the experience? "My heart is still dangling."

Sally Thomas
Scottsdale, Arizona

As part of a lesson on goals in my seventh grade health class, I shared a personal goal with the students. I explained to them that I was working hard at taking extra classes twice a week.

Eagerly, a boy from the back of the room raised his hand and said, "I know about those classes—you're working on your GED, right?"

Thomasine Falcone
Palmerton, Pennsylvania

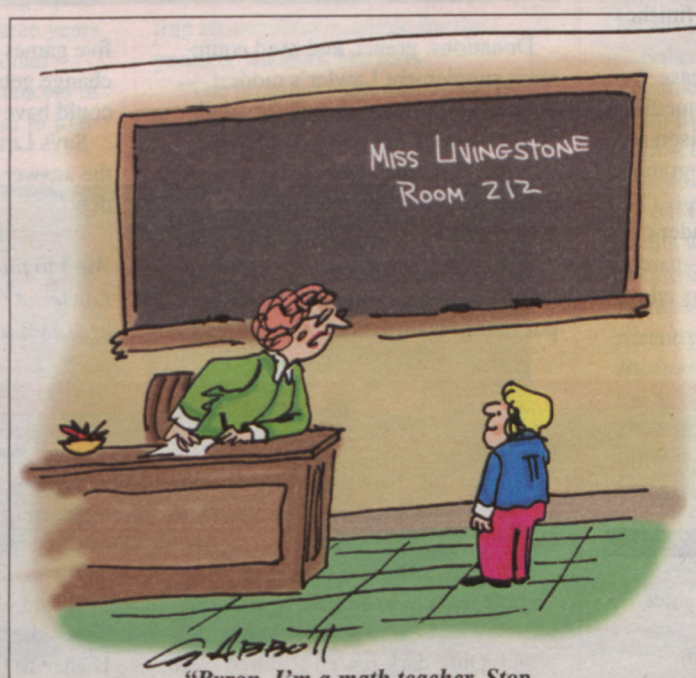
As I looked over the shoulder of one of my second grade students and commented on her work, she caught my eye.

"You look like my grandmother," she said.

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Oh, she's dead."

Luz Marie Guerra
Mountain View, California



"Byron, I'm a math teacher. Stop saying I'm in the numbers racket."

Striking a Chord

Each student in my seventh grade humanities class was to construct a mountain dulcimer.

"Today, ladies and gentlemen, we will start a project that will make you all into luthiers," I said, using the term for a person who builds stringed instruments.

One young lady immediately appeared alarmed and informed me that her mother would never let her do that.

"In my family," she said, "we're all Methodists."

Bruce Johanson
Ontonagon, Michigan

I was teaching my eighth grade music class about audio components. Just as I asked the question, "What do you think would make up the ultimate sound system?" the teacher in the room behind mine let out quite a loud yell.

My class froze—until one boy raised his hand and said, "Now *that* is the ultimate sound system."

He wasn't far from the truth.

Lisa Villani
Brockton, Massachusetts

In my Understanding Music class, I asked, "Why is a piano considered a percussion instrument?"

One student answered, "Because it's a *hitting* instrument."

Ouch!

Eleanor Lehmann
Merced, Califorina

While singing "America the Beautiful," one of my first graders sang out loud and clear, "And crown thy good with Robin Hood, from sea to shining sea."

Kathy Reeder
Little Hocking, Ohio

Got Laughs?

■ Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," *NEA Today,* 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

■ Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to **join-lightlane@list.nea.org** (no subject or message needed).

People

No Pain, Lots To Gain

In that staple of phys ed classes, the mile run, the least athletic kids make what NEA member **Phil Lawler** calls "the lonely trip down the stretch" after everyone else is finished.

Embarrassed, they grow up to avoid physical activity—but not to escape the health problems that come with an inactive lifestyle.

That's why Lawler, coordinator of physical education for schools in Naperville, Illinois, wants to revolutionize the way phys ed is taught.

Over the past 10 years, he and his colleagues have revamped the phys ed curriculum for their district's 21 schools. Gone is the traditional, "no pain, no gain" emphasis on athletic skills and competition. In its place: a focus on wellness and lifelong activity.

"Instead of meeting the needs of 20 percent of our kids—the athletes—we're meeting the needs of every kid who walks through the door," Lawler says.

At Madison Junior High, for example, kids work out in the school's 40-station "health club." They have their cholesterol checked, and they develop personal fitness plans.

Students wear heart monitors and earn points for working out at their target heart rate. That means an out-of-shape student who puts forth the effort can score as well as a star sprinter.

What about that mile run? Lawler replaced it with a weekly 12-*minute* run—and kids focus on improving their performance, not beating each other.

"In a 12-minute run, no one finishes last," Lawler explains.

Folks at the Centers for Disease Control think Lawler's onto something. The CDC has recognized Madison as one of eight model phys ed programs in the nation.

But the program bears up under even tougher scrutiny, Lawler says—parents rank their satisfaction with phys ed ahead of every other course.

Michele Litvin

Donations, grants, and used equipment supplement Lawler's modest budget, and Illinois' mandatory daily phys ed policy helps him keep kids moving. But educators short on resources and class time can still achieve gains in kids' fitness, he says.

Instead of dividing a class into two teams for touch football, for example, put four kids on a side and have four or five games going at once. That small change gets everyone moving—and could have a big payoff.

Says Lawler: "I honestly feel this is the answer to our national health care debt."

Want to find out more? Contact Phil Lawler at 630/420-6408 or by E-mail at plaw@uss.net.

Oz and Effect

Some people travel unusual paths on the way to becoming educators. **Phyllis Morton** took the Yellow Brick Road.

The Nevada third grade teacher became part of film history 60 years ago when she played a Munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Yet John F. Mendoza Elementary School's "Munchkin Lady" isn't Munchkin-sized.

MGM hired 20 children to play Munchkins, Morton explains. A wizened stage, screen, and radio actor at the ripe old age of 10—and small for her age—Morton appeared in all the Munchkinland scenes and sang along on such well-known tunes as "Ding Dong, the Witch Is Dead."

MGM was so bent on preserving the Munchkin mystique, however, that Morton's parents had to sign a release swearing that their daughter had not been in the film.

What was it like working with Hollywood legend Judy Garland?

"Oh, Judy and I had worked together around town," Morton shrugs. "Judy, Deanna Durbin, and I performed together often.

"I worked in about 30 movies, then did lots of stage work," she continues. "I sang and danced—but I didn't dance too well."

Morton did share the limelight with such stars as John Barrymore, Bing Crosby, and Jason Robards, Sr.

"I never worked with Shirley Temple, except to be paid to go to her birthday party," says Morton, who was blond. Only dark-haired children were allowed to be seen onscreen with the child superstar.

Then Tinseltown's loss became teaching's gain. Morton went to a college without a drama program, so she picked education instead. For the past 50 years, the classroom has been her stage.

When her sons were born, Morton says, friends from Hollywood urged her to steer them into acting.

"I said uh-uh. They're going to be kids," she says. "I never had a chance to be a kid. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything, but I wouldn't do it to anyone else. It was not a usual childhood."

Corbis Images

Bob Rina, Jr.

Stepping **Out**

Ben Duke

Ever since college, when **Kirsten Smith** learned to perform the fancy footwork known as stepping, she has used the dance form to bridge cultures and motivate students.

Smith, a special education teacher at Maryland's Valley View Elementary School, started a stepping squad for fifth and sixth graders three years ago. Her success with the squad caught the attention of the dancers of Step Afrika!—who asked her to join their performing group.

In December, Step Afrika! performed at a dance festival in South Africa at the invitation of the Soweto Dance Theatre. Smith and fellow dancers led festival workshops on American and African-American history, culture, and dance.

Back at home, Smith teaches kids in the Valley View Earthwatcher's Stepping Squad dances to perform at school and community events. She tries to educate them about the dance form and motivate them academically.

"The kids very much want to be in the club and learn the routines—but they have to maintain an *A* average to do so," Smith explains. "That keeps them very motivated to do well in school."

Smith also requires group members to perform at least nine hours of community service a year.

The result? All the kids on Smith's squad have improved their grades and their attitudes, and they're setting an excellent example for the younger students, she says.

"The program makes all the difference in the world in how they feel about themselves," Smith says.

On the **Right Track**

David Zalubowski

Early in her career, Adams City High School's **Pat Salas** saw many students struggle against the limitations that come with poverty and teen pregnancy.

Years later, their children started attending Adams—and they started having kids of their own. And the Colorado counselor decided it was high time the cycle was broken.

Salas created Making It Through Together (MITT), a mentoring program that steers at-risk middle and high school students toward higher education and a brighter future.

"MITT pairs up 50 students with adults who are retired teachers, corporate officials, and former mentees," says Salas, who was recently honored by *Colorado Business Magazine* for her work with the 10-year-old program.

Mentors make a year-long commitment to call students once a week and visit them in school once a month to encourage academic performance and attendance.

Salas takes MITT's mission to the doorsteps of local businesses to find role models and friends for her at-risk teens.

"I go door-to-door telling companies about our program," explains Salas, who has recruited mentors from firms such as US West, McDonald's, and Texaco. "You have to create opportunities for business-people to improve life for kids."

To help a student go from a broken spirit to one that soars is Salas's vision.

"A young man who went through our program never knew his father and is a product of teenage pregnancy," Salas says, "but he's graduating from college in May with an engineering degree."

War and **Remembrance**

Tom Strickland

Indiana history teacher **Tom Clark**'s students have looked into the many faces of war and learned that for every solidier lost, there is a family left to mourn and a story to be told.

Clark has set his Lake Central High School students on a herculean task: to compile biographies of all 11,680 Hoosiers killed or lost in World War II.

With only soldiers' names and dates of birth and death, Clark's students locate relatives by spending countless hours hunting through government records and newspapers. Then Clark and his students interview family members—and hear first-hand the toll war takes.

"The students find it hard to believe it's so tough on these families after all these years," Clark says.

The 675 biographies that the students have compiled so far are part of a computer database housed in a new World War II memorial in Indianapolis.

Future classes will continue the project—including following up on the 46,000 letters that veterans' families have sent Clark since the memorial's dedication in May.

That's a huge task, but Clark is used to taking the long view. Over the past 13 years he has had students collect and verify soldiers' names for state Korean and Viet Nam war memorials. The lessons learned on the way are worth the journey, he says.

"The students look at war in a different light," Clark says. "It's not a chapter in a textbook. We're actually putting a face and a story behind each of the numbers."

Over the years, students have uncovered many cases where veterans never received the medals they'd earned. Students have petitioned the military for the medals—including 27 long-overdue Bronze Stars—and presented them to the veterans or their families.

Money

Getting Started

What can I do to get control of my debt?

Getting out of debt is a tall order, but it can be done. Follow these eight steps:

1. Figure out how much you owe. Gather all your credit card statements and make a list that includes the interest rate, total amount you owe, and minimum monthly payment. List the highest-rate card first and so on.

2. Keep the two cards with the lowest rates. Cut the others up. Write to the card issuers and ask that those accounts be closed.

3. Resolve that you will use your cards only for essentials over the next six months. For other purchases, use cash or a debit card.

4. Add up your minimum monthly payments, and calculate how much you can pay over the minimum. Suppose the minimum payment on your credit cards totals $350 a month. What could you pay if you really stretched? $500?

5. Apply all of this additional repayment to the card with the highest rate. If two cards have the same rate, put the additional money on the card with the largest balance.

6. Consolidate your debt. Transfer your largest, high-rate balances to a card with a low rate and pay them down aggressively.

7. Pay the minimum on your lowest-rate cards until you've paid off the balance on the more expensive cards.

8. Consider using your savings to get out of debt. If your savings are in the bank, you're earning just over 3.2 percent to carry debt at 18 percent or more.

Did You Know?

. . .that you can use the NEA Member Benefits Web site to figure out what it would take to become a millionaire?

Or how large a line of credit you can obtain. Or which is better: a new or used car.

With 85 different interactive financial calculators currently available on the NEA Member Benefits Web site, you have the tools right at your fingertips to get the answers—and much more. Check it out at www.neamb.com.

Can You Afford...?

All That's to Your Credit

Who figures out if you're credit-worthy? A cold, calculating computer. Here's how.

Suppose you ran up several thousand dollars worth of debt as a college student. For a time, you couldn't even make the minimum payments, but you whittled away and eventually paid off the entire balance.

Now you're a college graduate (with honors) and have a good job in a great public school. Choose the statement that best describes your situation:

a. You are guaranteed the right to a low-interest-rate credit card.

b. You may have to pay a higher rate for your card.

c. You might get a credit card, you might not.

The answer is "c." Credit is not a right. Even if you have a clean record, it doesn't mean that you can get a card. Fair or not, that's the way credit works.

And you need credit. Your credit record determines not only how much you pay for your purchases, but also whether you can rent an apartment or a car, get a job or a mortgage.

Credit today depends not on your integrity, but on a computer-generated credit score that compares certain things about you—like how much money you earn, how long you've been using credit, whether you've made payments on time—to other groups of people who have repaid their loans.

"The lender wants to know, 'If I lend money to 100, or 1,000 or 10,000 borrowers with certain characteristics, will 90 percent or 95 percent or 99 percent repay?'" says Peter McCorkell, senior vice president at Fair Isaac, the leader in developing these scoring systems for lenders.

Both the score and the statistics that go into it are top secret. "If a borrower knows he needs 10 more points to qualify for a particular loan and that closing two bankcard accounts will raise his score by 12 points, he can go out and close two accounts today," McCorkell explains.

If you get a bad score and you're turned down for credit, you can't find out what pulled it down. Some things are obvious—paying on time gives you more points than paying late. But a low income can give you a lower score, too. Critics say that this scoring system discriminates against minorities—much like redlining in other industries.

So how do you improve your credit score? In *The Ultimate Credit Handbook*, Gerri Deitweiler says, "The more you look like other people who pay their bills on time, the more likely it is the computer will approve your application."

Some of the things that weigh heavily are stability—both at home and on the job—and good payment history. The scoring system looks at how close you are to the limits on your cards, what you spend money on, and how much you ask for in cash advances.

"But don't despair," Deitweiler says. "Even if you are head over heels in debt, you can rebuild your credit and improve your score."

If you have a lot of available credit out there, you can reduce your score by closing some accounts. But the best way to improve your score is to pay your bills regularly—and on time.

—Mary Rowland

Are You Carrying Too Much Debt?

Use this worksheet to calculate your debt-to-income ratio. List your creditors in the first column—but don't include rent, utilities, or similar bills. To figure your monthly payment on revolving credit cards like Visa and MasterCard, use 4 percent of the balance.

Lender	Monthly payment	Total owed
Car	_____	_____
Visa	_____	_____
MasterCard	_____	_____
Department store credit card	_____	_____
Equipment purchased	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____
DIVIDED BY		
Monthly income (before tax)	_____	
EQUALS		
Debt-to-income ratio	_____	

How Did You Do?

If your debt-to-income ratio is...	Then...
Under .10	You're in great shape.
Approaching .20	Be careful—it's getting too high.
Approaching .35	Danger! Danger!
Approaching .50	It's time to consider getting help.

Resources

Managing debt is often easier said than done. Before you know it, it seems you have more expenses than money to pay for them. Or you get hit with a major repair bill.

Whatever your situation, the NEA Credit Plan can help make your debt more "manageable." You can borrow from $3,000 to $25,000, with repayment terms from 24 to 84 months. And there's no collateral required.

So, whether you're looking to consolidate your bills, pay down high-interest debt, or finance a major purchase, you may want to consider the NEA Credit Plan.

For more information, call an NEA Credit Plan representative, 800/468-7632, seven days a week, 8 a.m. to midnight, ET.

How Are You Doing?

Who Needs an Estate Plan?

You're never too young or too poor to plan for the hereafter.

Who:
Carlos Villarreal, Jr., age 44, electronics technician for the San Antonio, Texas, Independent School District

Financial Goal:
To develop an estate plan

Game Plan:
Villarreal, who is divorced and has three grown children, admits that he has done very little when it comes to estate planning—in part because until recently, he didn't think he was old enough to need a will, let alone an estate plan.

"Now I'm nearing 45, and I realize I haven't looked to the future," Villarreal says. "Like a lot of people, I've avoided thinking about my own death and what would happen to my family afterwards. And I've always assumed I didn't have that much to pass on to my children, so I didn't need to worry about a will.

"I have a life insurance policy, and my kids are the beneficiaries," he continues. "For a long time, I figured that was the best I could do for them. But I need to think about doing more."

The Experts Say:
If you think you're not old enough—or you don't have enough property—to need an estate plan, think again. Your age and net worth have nothing to do with why you should have a plan.

At the very least, you need a will to make sure your assets are distributed according to your wishes and to select a guardian for your minor children. If you die without a will, these decisions will by made by state law and judges.

Without a will, some of your property may not go to your spouse, but directly to your children. The problem with children inheriting directly is that the surviving parent may need to get court permission to manage the money—a waste of time and money in most families.

To save your family the cost and hassles of probate court proceedings after your death, think about creating a revocable living trust. It's no more trouble than writing a will, and it lets everything go directly to your heirs after your death, without taking an expensive detour through probate court.

While you're alive, the trust has no effect, and you can revoke it or change its terms at any time. But after your death, the person you chose to be your "successor trustee" takes control of trust property and transfers it according to your instructions. It's quick and simple.

There are other, even easier ways to avoid probate as well as estate taxes.

- You can turn any bank account into a "payable-on-death" account simply by signing a form and naming someone to inherit the account at your death. You can do the same thing in many states with securities.
- To reduce estate taxes, give away property before your death. You can give any number of individuals gifts of up to $10,000 a year ($20,000 for married couples giving joint gifts) tax-free. Gifts larger than $10,000 are subject to gift tax. Gifts to your spouse, gifts to pay for tuition or medical bills, or gifts to a tax-exempt organization are exempt.
- Create certain kinds of trusts, such as the AB trust. Each spouse leaves property to the children—with the crucial condition that the surviving spouse has the right to use the income that property produces for as long as he or she lives. In some circumstances, the surviving spouse may even be able to spend principal. By 2006, an AB trust will shield up to $2 million from estate tax.

Delcia Lopez

School electronics technician Carlos Villarreal, Jr., says he "needs to think about doing more" estate planning to make things easier for his family down the road.

Resources

When is the best time to start thinking about estate planning? If you have a family, the best time is now. Regardless of your age or income, it's never too early to plan for your family's future.

The NEA Level Premium Term Life Insurance Plan provides up to $250,000 of decreasing term life insurance coverage with a premium that doesn't increase. With a variety of payment options available, planning for your family's future has never been easier.

For more information about this or other products provided by the NEA Members Insurance Trust, call NEA Member Benefits, 800/637-4636, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday-Friday (Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET.

Continuing On

Should I convert my deductible IRA to a Roth IRA? What are the qualifications for conversion?

In case you've missed all the hoopla surrounding Roth IRAs, here's the scoop: You invest after-tax money, watch it grow tax-free, and pay no taxes when you tap the account after age 59½.

You can contribute up to $2,000 a year—$4,000 for couples—if your adjusted gross income is $95,000 or less for singles and $150,000 or less for married couples filing jointly. Your contribution isn't tax-deductible.

Unlike other IRAs, Roths don't require that you start tapping your account at age 70½, and you can keep contributing as long as you have earned income. After five years, you're allowed to withdraw up to $10,000 tax-free for the purchase of your first home.

You can convert your existing IRA to a Roth IRA if your adjusted gross income doesn't exceed $100,000. You will, however, have to pay taxes on your earnings and, if the IRA was deductible, on the original contribution.

Experts suggest that it may be worth converting if you're a long way from retirement and you can afford to pay all the taxes from conversion from another source. They also recommend a rollover if you're confident that you'll retire to a tax bracket above or slightly below the one you're at now. If you think you may be in a much lower tax bracket, the traditional IRA may be a better option for you.

Retiring Soon?

Thinking about retirement? Don't forget that membership in NEA-Retired offers you a continuation of Association activism, benefits tailored to your needs as a retiree, plus workshops, conferences, and volunteer opportunities.

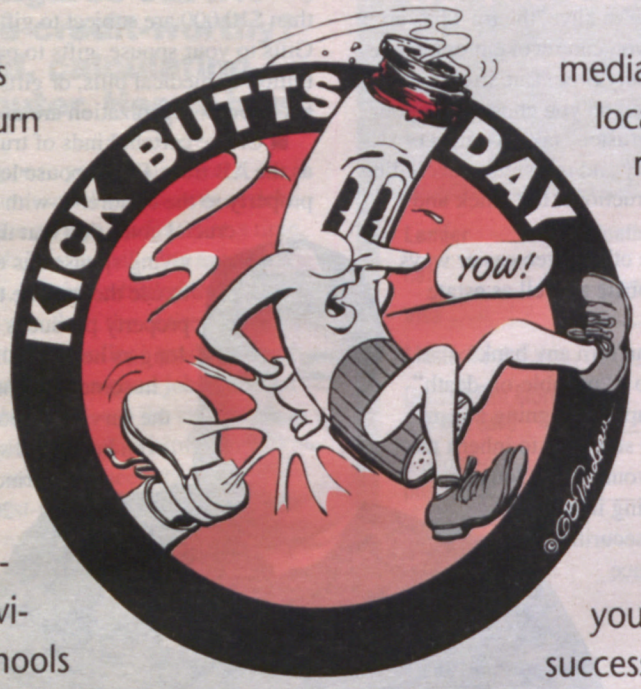
You'll also receive *NEA Retired* magazine, a bimonthly publication covering Association news and the latest on Social Security, pension, and health issues—as well as feature articles on NEA-Retired members around the country.

Join now as a pre-retired member. Contact NEA-Retired, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. On the Web at www.nea.org/retired.

Kick Butts Day '99: Take A Stand Against Big Tobacco

April 14, 1999

Here's an opportunity for you and your students to join with the NEA Health Information Network and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to demand a healthy future for America's children.



For decades Big Tobacco has targeted kids. Now it's time to turn the tide. On April 14, 1999 — Kick Butts Day — teachers all across the country will join forces with thousands of kids, parents, and community leaders to fight tobacco addiction and secondhand smoke.

Elementary, middle, and high school students will demonstrate their leadership and creativity with events at hundreds of schools across the country. Activities include undercover buying operations, rallies in schools and state capitols, mock trials for Mr. Butts and the Marlboro Man, and much more.

These anti-tobacco messages reach millions of Americans through extensive Kick Butts Day media coverage from TV networks and local affiliates, national and local radio, magazines, and newspapers.

Every day, more than 3,000 kids become regular smokers; tobacco will eventually kill one-third of them. Tobacco companies target the young to addict lifetime customers. We can break this deadly cycle.

A free activity guide will give you everything you need to plan a successful Kick Butts Day with your students. To order your free guide, call us at (202) 296-5469, visit **www.kickbuttsday.org**, or send us the coupon below.

Kick Butts Day 1999: Stand up. Fight Back. Make a difference for America's kids.

NEA HIN & CAMPAIGN for TOBACCO-FREE Kids

For more information on the CAMPAIGN FOR TOBACCO-FREE KIDS, visit our Web site at www.tobaccofreekids.org

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NEA HIN & Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
Kick Butts Day '99
Activity Guide Request Form

Name: _____
Ms./Mr./Mrs. First MI Last

Organization/School: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____ Number of Guides Requested (limit of 3, please): _____

Mail your completed form to:
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
1707 L Street N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036
FAX: 202-296-5427
Or find this form on our Web site, www.kickbuttsday.org.

Want to fight tobacco year-round?
Join the Campaign's National Action Network. There is no cost to join this initiative, which gives you the tools and information you need to help keep the tobacco industry from targeting our kids.

☐ Check the box to receive your free membership materials.

My Turn

Stage Right . . . or Left Out?

Behind the scenes? Bit parts? Not anymore. Today's school secretaries must take on starring roles.

By Tudi Harwood

In just a year, the much ballyhooed millennium will arrive, and I worry for those of us who do office work in our nation's public schools. Big changes are coming, and I'm afraid many of us are unprepared.

Ten years ago, we were hired for our fast typing and dictation skills. Today, our jobs involve so much more.

Today, we've evolved into self-directed building managers, handling changing demands in office technology, state and federal mandates, and crisis management. At the same time, we're reaching out to the school community to help improve student learning.

In effect, we're becoming the stage crew of our schools, managing the changing scenes of paper that wrap around every student. It's our job to show the world that our schools are always ready for opening night.

To do that job well, we must rethink a few things. We've got to work differently to make time for many new tasks. We've got to put aside the competitive edges between secretaries that impede growth and learning. And, most important, we've got to be represented on school improvement teams.

In the early 1990s, my district began to examine the future of our two high schools. As a high school secretary working for a key administrator on the committee, I was drafted into the fold—allegedly to represent support staff, but no doubt to type the summaries.

Still, I sat shoulder to shoulder with teachers, administrators, board of education members, parents, and students, as we pondered the future, examined the research, and brainstormed how our district might carve out its own unique niche.

Representation on that committee was a great way of hearing and being heard. And having a sense of the big picture helped me do a better job with every phone call I fielded and every person I greeted at the counter.

Some support employees don't think they have enough to add to the conversation to merit a seat at the table. Too often, secretaries invited onto school teams say, "No thanks, I have work to do." Safe retreat, dismissive smile.

Some say it's easier to leave the big decisions to others. I say, in the long run, our complacency is far riskier.

If we stay on the sidelines:

■ *We take our lumps.* Big change that is done "to" us, without our input, hurts feelings—and productivity.

■ *We risk our livelihoods.* You never know when clerical downsizing might be on the agenda. We need someone on the team who understands our value—current and future—and our commitment to the school community.

■ *We damage efforts to improve education.* Without realizing it, those who are left in the dark can scuttle schoolwide improvement efforts.

Let me give you an example of the power of uninformed words. A few years ago, an angry parent rang our main office during a curriculum half-day to complain about "teenagers running wild in the neighborhoods!"

A startled co-worker, within my earshot, sympathetically answered, "Well, the kids were let go for teachers' meetings. No, I don't know what the teachers are meeting about. They never tell us anything."

Lack of ownership equates to zero interest for even the most inspiring school improvement efforts. And when those answering the phones have no ownership, you can't expect community buy-in to follow.

No matter how techno-with-it our high schools become, school office workers are still the front line to the surrounding community. We can only be enthusiastic about where our schools are headed if we help paint the road signs.

To be in the know, we have to take what we do for our schools seriously enough to seek out information—it won't be handed to us.

We must speak out about how new demands have changed our workplace, join committees, offer solutions, and help develop a new approach together.

If we know change is coming, we will be ready. And we will implement that change as valued members of a full cast, producing excellence.

If, on the other hand, we sit these changes out, it just might be curtains for the stage crew at the dawn of the new century.

Bob Chase

A high school principal's secretary, NEA member Tudi Harwood is president of the Grosse Pointe Association of Office Personnel in Michigan. She can be reached via E-mail at HarwooT@gp.k12.mi.us.

You Said It

Bill Fischer, editor

In a recent *New York Times* feature, author Francine Prose wrote that "few middle class parents will pretend to be elated by the news that their children have decided to teach elementary school."

Added Prose: "It's amazing that anyone teaches, that anyone wants to or can."

That attitude—because the profession isn't respected and teachers are underpaid, it's better to find other lines of work—is something that NEA member Janet Ruwe has come across many times. She offers a different perspective.

"I've always been proud to be called a teacher," says Ruwe, who retired this year after 25 years as an elementary teacher in the Meridian, Idaho, schools. And she's just as proud that three daughters have followed her into the profession.

Two of the teacher-daughters are also married to teachers. So when the families all gather for dinner, it's not difficult to guess what the conversation is all about.

All of the Ruwe women, interestingly, entered college thinking about other careers, even though they'd grown up watching their mother bridge home and teaching. And now a Ruwe son, who's in a technical field, is also thinking about—you guessed it—teaching.

What the Ruwe children have inherited from their mother is a genuine desire to help young people and the joy and satisfaction that go with that role.

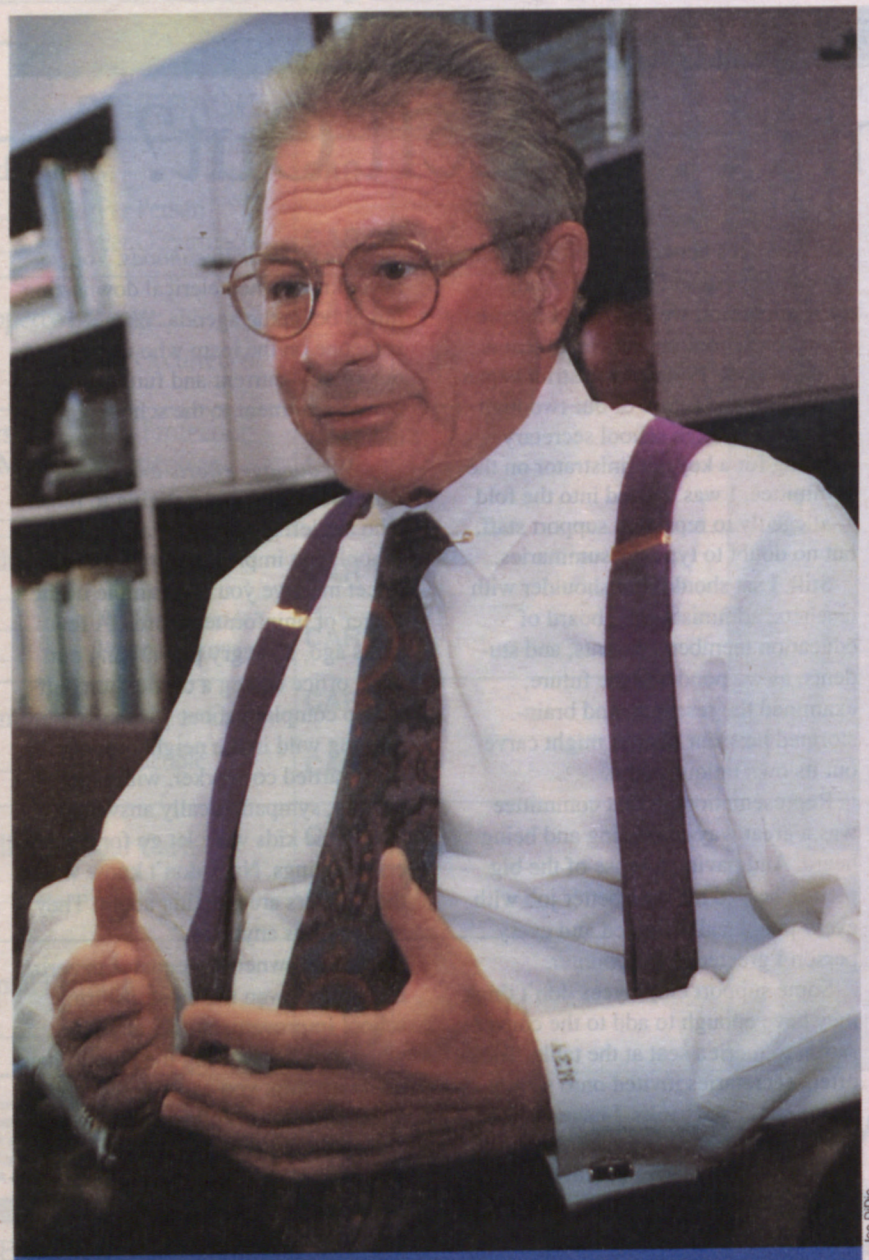
"When I decided to leave teaching after 25 years," recalls Janet, "it wasn't because I was burned out or bored. I just thought it was time for me to do something else.

"That last day when I walked the schoolyard for the last time," adds this veteran educator, "I still felt good about teaching, just as I had when I began my career.

"I know other professions often pay more and are sometimes more respected," sums up Janet, "but I can't think of anything that's more rewarding than knowing you've helped someone learn."

Bill Fischer

Meet



Joe DiDio

Art Wise

The Profession's Seal of Approval

Like Rodney Dangerfield and Aretha Franklin, most teachers just want a little respect. Art Wise wants to help them get it.

How? By creating and enforcing high standards for entering the teaching profession.

As president of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, Wise oversees a national effort to determine which schools of education are truly equipped to give teachers the preparation they need to hit the ground running.

Why aren't all schools of education meeting high standards? In a recent interview with NEA Today*'s Stefanie Weiss, Wise explained.*

You refer to schools of education as "cash cows" for their parent institutions. Why?
It's a largely unreported national scandal that students at schools of education are helping to finance the rest of the university. They pay the same tuition as students in other parts of the university, and yet we find that the university spends less on them.

By keeping the cost of teacher education low, universities generate profits that they use to support many other parts of the institution, including business, law, and medical schools, and colleges of liberal arts. They're all financed, in part, from the profits of teacher education.

How do ed schools get away with shortchanging students?
It happens because other professional schools must meet rigorous national professional standards, but for colleges of education, accreditation is optional. Meeting rigorous standards costs money, and by the time some universities meet the demands of the other schools and their accrediting associations, frankly, they run out of cash.

What could schools of education do with proper funding?
Right now, most education classes consist of one instructor standing up in front of a class lecturing to any number of individuals. We know—from research and common sense—that the preparation of teachers requires much more than that. It requires hands-on time, practical experience monitored by experienced veterans and university faculty, instruction in the use of technology. These things cost money.

How many schools of education now meet national professional standards?
There are 1,300 schools of education in the United States. About 500 are now NCATE-accredited, but those 500 prepare about two-thirds of the nation's teachers.

Exactly what is NCATE?
It's important for teachers to understand that the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education is the teaching profession's accrediting association. It's not a government agency. It's not a distant bureaucracy. NCATE is financed and staffed, in part, by the 33 professional associations—including NEA—that support it and by the colleges that are accredited.

How are practicing teachers involved in NCATE's work?
Practicing teachers serve on all the committees that develop our standards and help us carry out our work. And NCATE has a 400-member Board of Examiners—one-third of whom are named by NEA and AFT—to evaluate the quality of colleges of education.

How do you judge the quality of teacher education programs?
NCATE standards hold teacher preparation programs accountable for graduates who know their subject matter and are able to teach it effectively. Candidate performance is thoroughly assessed before graduation.

Prospective teachers from accredited schools are able to explain why they use particular strategies, reflect on their practice, and change what doesn't work.

Should public schools only hire graduates from accredited colleges?
That's the profession's goal. Law firms don't hire people who haven't passed the bar. Hospitals don't hire doctors unless they've graduated from accredited schools. In the long run, that's exactly where we should be with respect to the nation's teachers.

Why should practicing teachers care about NCATE?
The future welfare of the teaching force and the esteem with which teachers will be held are closely related to the quality of teacher preparation, to meaningful reforms of the licensing process, and, for those teachers who want it, to advanced certification offered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

History reveals that these key instruments—accreditation, licensing, and certification—have been the levers by which public confidence in other professions has been raised. It's time now to do the same for teaching, the most important of all professions.

What can NEA members do to boost confidence in teachers?
Several critical things: 1) Find out which schools of education in your area are professionally accredited. 2) If your alma mater isn't NCATE-accredited, write to the president and the dean, explaining how the institution would benefit by qualifying. 3) Ask your principal to recruit teachers and interns only from NCATE-accredited schools. 4) Ask district administrators and school board members to include graduation from an NCATE-accredited school as a factor in hiring.

Resources

- Contact the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036, 202/466-7496. Send E-mail to ncate@ncate.org.
- For a complete list of accredited schools of education, visit NCATE's Web site at www.ncate.org.
- If you'd like to join the many NEA members who help NCATE do its job, contact June VanderVeen, NEA Teaching and Learning, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 202/822-7661. Send E-mail to JVanderVeen@nea.org.

Debate

Should today's education be relevant to tomorrow's job market?

Yes

Norish Adams, coordinator of curriculum and research at the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School, has been a pioneer in the school-to-work movement in her area. A veteran teacher, pre-service instructor, and Association activist, Adams can be reached at nadams2@famu.edu.

Over the course of my 30-year career, I've found no approach to teaching—and I've tried dozens—that has been as successful as one that ties subject knowledge to career development.

When students explore the future job market as an authentic component of learning, concepts take on more meaning than when introduced as abstract rules, definitions, and manipulations.

Here's what I've seen:

■ *Linking school and work enriches curriculum.* The beauty, creativity, and challenges of mathematics, for example, are richly revealed when viewed from the perspective of a doctor, master carpenter, quilter, astronaut, political analyst, or artist.

■ *Linking school and work motivates students.* Some of my students participate in a five-day career shadowing program at a nearby corporation. They learn first-hand about becoming a computer scientist, engineer, human resource director, and support employee with the space flight program.

Back in class, they write about their experiences and file their work in "course/career portfolios" that focus their thinking on school, work, and the connections between the two.

As one of my most reluctant students said, "The best part of keeping the portfolio is that it helps me see how all this required stuff fits into my life and helps to make it better."

■ *Linking school and work keeps options open for all students, without "tracks."* At the public high school in Tallahassee where I work, we don't have separate vocational and academic paths for students, relegating application to one and theory to the other.

Students in academic classes need not ask, "When will I ever really use this?" Teachers will never have to say, "You'll understand next year when you go to college."

Instead, we're in the process of creating six career academies in the areas of business, health sciences, architecture and design, engineering, public policy, and education. These areas were selected based on job predictions in Florida and the nation, as well as surveyed student interests.

Our goal: to give all students a rigorous education in the basics, plus the skills they'll need in problem-solving, technology, business, and public policy to thrive in today's job market—and tomorrow's.

■ *Linking school and work helps students find their way with a minimum of struggle and cost.* Ninety percent of our students go on to post secondary education. Many must work to help pay college costs, and they can't afford the luxury of taking six or seven years to graduate.

Our schoolwide career development program ensures that our graduates don't enter college unprepared to make wise, informed choices about their major, and that they don't flounder or drop out during the first year or two of college.

■ *Linking school and work is the best way to prepare students for whatever lies ahead.* Young people who understand the world they will work in will take the classes, engage in the activities, do the reading, join the organizations, and enter the competitions that will prepare them for the jobs of the 21st century—whatever they may be.

No

Janette Gerdes teaches English and literature at Signal Hill School in Illinois. She was nominated for a Golden Apple Award in 1997 and recognized in Who's Who Among American Teachers in 1998. A member of the Belleville Education Association, Gerdes can be reached at jgerdes@stclair.k12.il.us.

Teachers should never allow the near-sacred mission of learning to be polluted by letting the public schools become the minor leagues for corporate America.

The goal of public schools should not be to train children to be worker drones. The goal should be to educate them so that they may enjoy full, happy, and productive lives.

If we educate kids to be thinkers, questioners, and problem-solvers, they'll do fine in the ever-changing, rarely predictable job market.

When I started teaching 10 years ago, the Internet was still used almost exclusively by scientists and government, a much smaller percentage of families owned home computers, and no one had even heard of anything called the World Wide Web.

Since then, we've seen huge changes in technology and the media, the Cold War has ended, and HMOs have overtaken American health care. What could we have taught the class of 1988 that would be relevant to today's job market anyway?

What we need to teach our students is how to read, write, think, question, and learn. Let the employers handle the specifics of job training.

Of course it's wholly appropriate to use technology to shape young minds. We should use whatever tools are available to turn kids on to learning, and kids love computers.

But a student with a well-rounded education—rather than one targeted for a job market that's likely to be obsolete by the time she's ready to enter it—has the advantage in the job market and, more importantly, will be better prepared to lead a full, satisfying life.

NEA Today ran a cover story on the school-to-work movement last spring, which included anecdotes of students who became more motivated by participating in career-based learning.

But I suspect there are also kids who were turned off. And, worse, students focusing on math classes as a prelude to careers as pilots still might not see the point of studying literature or history.

This type of schooling sends such a terrible message to students—that learning is meaningful only when connected to a future job.

We have to be better than that, better than our money-obsessed culture. We have to show kids that there is more to life than a job, even a rewarding one.

There is the beauty of the natural world. There is freedom and the history of the struggle to achieve it. There is the tapestry of diverse cultures. There are great writers who speak to us from across the decades and centuries. And, yes, boys and girls, there is the immense pleasure of learning for its own sake.

I understand that people must have jobs to survive. But I will always teach my junior high English and literature students that life is about more than survival.

Robert Frost put it more eloquently than I ever could:

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only when love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sake.

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Should today's education be relevant to tomorrow's job

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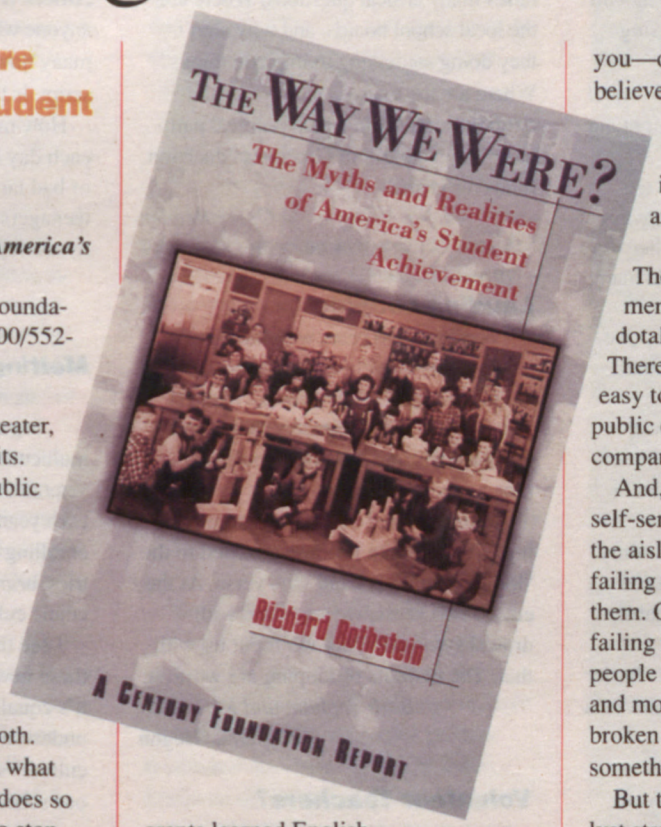

THE WAY WE WERE?
The Myths and Realities of America's Student Achievement
Richard Rothstein
A Century Foundation Report

The Way We Were?
The Myths and Realities of America's Student Achievement
Richard Rothstein. Century Foundation Press, 140 pp., $11.95, 800/552-5450 or 212/535-4441.

Yell "fire" in a crowded theater, and folks rush for the exits. Yell "failure" in a crowded public school, then stop and wonder: Will folks rush to reform—or escape with the first private school voucher that comes along?

Motivated by a desire to stop the yelling, the American people have so far done both. What they haven't done—and what researcher Richard Rothstein does so well in this slim volume—is to stop the yelling with the truth: American schools aren't failing.

In *The Way We Were? The Myths and Realities of America's Student Achievement*, Rothstein searches high and low for "the golden—or at least silver—age of education." You know, the time when all kids behaved, social promotion was unheard of, and immigrants learned English the hard way.

Of course, Rothstein finds that "such an age never was." In fact, after carefully reviewing reams of statistical data, Rothstein concludes that "there is no serious evidence for a decline in school quality."

Tell that to your brother-in-law and watch his eyes roll. He won't believe you—or Rothstein. He's a die-hard believer in the "fable of failure." And he's not alone.

Why are so many people inclined to believe that schools are worse than ever before?

Rothstein gives a few reasons. There's "invented nostalgia"—the memory does play tricks, and anecdotal "evidence" is everywhere. There's misreading of the statistics—easy to do, given the complexity of public education and the difficulty of comparing data over time.

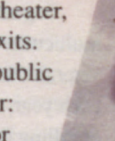
And, Rothstein suggests, there's self-serving rhetoric—on both sides of the aisle. Some say public schools are failing so that the public will abandon them. Others say public schools are failing to prompt reform. After all, people are more likely to spend time and money fixing something that's broken than gradually improving something that's not.

But the trumped-up crisis-as-catalyst strategy is sure to backfire.

As Rothstein notes: "It is not necessary to believe that cars are now falling apart, that computer quality is declining, or that people are getting sicker in order to support a quest for further improvement in these products and services. Schools should be no exception."

—*Stefanie Weiss*

NEA Professional Library Top 10 Bestseller List



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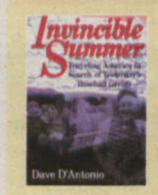


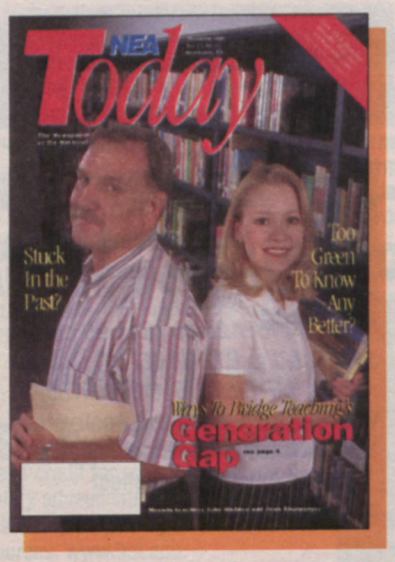
Invincible Summer
Traveling America in Search of Yesterday's Baseball Greats. Dave D'Antonio. *Diamond Comm., Inc., 229 pp., $15.95 plus s&h to P.O. Box 88, South Bend, IN 46624, 219/299-9728.* Join the author's five-month, 26,000-mile journey in search of the graves of baseball's greats.

Wind Riders
Sharon Herndon Dye. *Vantage Books, 40 pp., $10.50 includes s&h to 516 West 34th St., New York, NY 10001.* The author's "rock-solid motto": "If no one sends you flowers, grow your own." Poems about spirit, prayer, children, promise, and life.

What Can You Do With a Word
Dorothy Raymond. *Academic Therapy Publications, 143 pp., $10 plus $3 s&h to 20 Commercial Blvd., Navato, CA 94947.* This book contains 300 activities to reinforce reading instruction "that require little or no teacher preparation and are adaptable to all learners." Useful for special ed staff.

Red Light, Green Light
Preventing Teen Pregnancy. Janet Ollila Colberg. Summer Kitchen Press, 120 pp., $14.50 plus $3 s&h to 314 Chaucer St., Helena, MT 59601, 800/418-5237. A guide for those working to prevent teen pregnancy. Includes vignettes, counseling protocol, and "a warm approach to the spiritual depth of teens."

Letters



Generation Gap

As a third-year teacher, your article on teaching's generation gap had my full attention (Cover story, November).

In my first year of teaching, I had an incredible amount of opposition from veteran teachers to two of my ideas. Despite their negativity, I pressed on, and both of my units were a complete success. I didn't appreciate their lack of respect for my ideas or their lack of excitement about our profession.

So listen up rookies: If you want to try something, do it! Don't let anyone try to dampen your enthusiasm. Only you know your students and your teaching style. Stand up for yourself and your kids. I'm glad I did.

LaDonna Ramos
Oxnard, California

Two aspects of your article on the generation gap really rubbed me the wrong way. First, the rookie who says, "There's more to life than teaching" also suggests that planning your curriculum a few months ahead of time is a waste of time. That's ridiculous.

Second, the veteran who says, "Trust us when we say your idea won't work," is equally silly. There are so many variables to a lesson—just because it didn't work for one person doesn't mean it won't work for someone else.

So, veterans, if a rookie wants to do something that didn't work for you, encourage it. Don't put it in a negative light.

Stuart Prince
Tacoma, Washington

Freedom for What?

Your article on academic freedom and the courts (Rights Watch, November) suggests that teachers should be able to say or do anything they please without any consequences.

R-rated movies and obscene language don't belong in the classroom. School districts should have the right to fire teachers who abuse their positions and think they can use any material under the guise of free speech. NEA should back up these school districts and hope that all teachers can be creative without using offensive language or movies.

Robin Bedford
Billings, Montana

NEA's attorney suggests that "a creative educator should seek out ways to teach controversial and challenging ideas without utilizing language that many may find offensive." Tough order.

If we avoid "offensive language," we would eliminate Shakespeare, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, George Orwell, John Steinbeck, Willa Cather, and others from our reading lists. There are no parallels for such talent.

"Creative educators" fulfill their duty to the artist as well as to the audience—and can then only hope for reasonable responses from all parties.

Janis Butler
Bakersfield, California

Kids Deserve Better

Many of the people profiled in your story on the need for school modernization (Cover story, October) work in schools that are 20 or 30 years old. In the rural district where I teach, *all* the elementary schools are approaching the hundred year mark!

We can't enter the computer age because none of these schools have adequate wiring or telephone equipment, and we have no big businesses to tap for financial support.

Our only hope is to elect government officials willing to go out on a limb to provide the dollars needed to ensure a quality education for all children.

Linda Schulthes
London Mills, Illinois

I agree that our students deserve better, and I cringe when I see schools in such deplorable condition. But the situation raises many critical questions: Where are the local school boards, and why aren't they doing something to improve things? Where are the maintenance crews and custodial staff? And which political party has been in control of Georgia's education funds for years?

Garry Reader
Louisville, Kentucky

Lauding Looping

Looping—two years with the same students—has been a great success in our classrooms (Inside Scoop, October). Our first and second graders share morning calendar time and afternoon center time as peer partners.

An unexpected outcome: parent bonding! Teachers can become attached to the "looping families" and vice versa. At the end of two years, we see some withdrawal symptoms, but we'll put up with that. The benefits of looping are worth it.

Barb Topham and Kerry Bell
Portland, Oregon

Volunteer Teachers?

When asked how to assure all students get enough time on the computer, one teacher notes (Students & Strategies, October) that his school has a volunteer teacher teaching keyboarding.

A *volunteer* teacher? Does his school also rely on volunteers to teach social studies or math? Teaching keyboarding requires training and expertise to coach students in the correct techniques to maximize their skill development.

If a school district is serious in its desire to acclimate students to a technological world, use of certified, paid keyboarding instructors is a must.

Mary Jones
Neenah, Wisconsin

MORE SENSELESS VIOLENCE IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

Jerry Dolezal/San Francisco Bay Guardian

No Good Will

You recently praised "Good Will Hunting" stars Matt Damon and Ben Affleck (Heroes & Zeroes, October). But anyone who saw their movie knows how many times curse words were used in the script. Is the NEA really proud of this?

How many students are disciplined each day by NEA members for their use of bad language? Is it any wonder that teenagers today are confused by the hypocrisy they see in adults?

Joey Gruner
Mahomet, Illinois

Melting Pot

Hats off to *NEA Today* for the continuing articles on the need for teaching multiculturalism in our schools. As a veteran teacher of 28 years, I've found that each year, more of the students we're enrolling come directly from other countries, bringing with them a variety of ethnic cultural backgrounds.

I see the importance of educating these new students about our culture. But it's equally important for educators to understand as much as we can about the cultures of these new children entering our schools.

Donna Mollan
Vancouver, Washington

Look to Libraries

Something was missing from the Learning First Alliance's "Action Plan for Reading" (Innovators, October). Textbooks, staff development, teaching strategies, parental support, and tutoring are all mentioned. But no where are recreational reading books or libraries listed.

School library media centers, public libraries, and library media teachers play a key role in providing those books and supporting reading programs. Don't overlook them when it comes to reading or curriculum resource materials.

Cynthia Wong
Los Angeles, California

Who's Paying?

I'm truly amazed that your article about retiring early (Money, October) implies that retired teachers who have earned Social Security credits outside of education can actually receive full Social Security benefits.

In reality, any benefits earned by a member of a "qualified retirement plan"—that's most teachers—will be reduced by 90 percent. Most retirees in this situation will be lucky to receive enough Social Security for dinner out once a month.

Ron van Noord
Dublin, California

Editor's note: Because our featured teacher, Nancy Tankersley, will receive a pension through the Kentucky Teacher Retirement System, she won't receive full

Social Security benefits should she become eligible. According to the Social Security Administration, her benefits will be reduced by an amount determined by several factors, including retirement age, the number of Social Security credits she's accumulated, the amount she's paid in Social Security taxes, and the size of her pension. We apologize for any confusion.

Just Say No—to Dr. Ruth

No, I don't want Dr. Ruth talking to my students (Meet, October). Her answer to five-year-olds who ask where babies come from is way too explicit. It's completely unnecessary to give kids that age that much detail.

Also, sexual responsibility entails a whole lot more than not hurting anybody. Teen sex always ends up hurting someone in the long run. We need some real role models for this subject, not people like Dr. Ruth.

Anita Clayton
Port Republic, New Jersey

I wish Dr. Ruth could hear my inner voice right now. I wouldn't let her within 100 yards of my five-year-old. I can hardly fathom her belief that they need to know that "the penis is placed inside the vagina." What strange ideas can be formed in the minds of little ones with that kind of information!

And why leave teens to trust their "inner voices"? Should we let them stumble into decisions that can create or abort life, and may lead to death or disease?

Here's my suggestion for *your* inner voice, Dr. Ruth: Put a sock in it!

Ron Rock
Redmond, Oregon

More of Life's Ironies

Diane Brunson's story about running into her former students in the radiology lab (My Turn, October) reminds me of a similar encounter a few years ago.

I had just gotten my B.S. in education and was out shopping with my mother when a familiar looking woman approached. She told my mom that she had enjoyed teaching her daughter—me—years ago, and always knew I'd be successful.

Before I could say hello, Delores Hines came over and hugged me. During that embrace, I seemed to go back in time to all those comforting hugs I received when I did something great in grammar school or when another classmate teased me.

I know that Ms. Hines is only one of the many reasons I decided to become a teacher. In fact, after our chance meeting, she helped me find a teaching job.

Teresa Melissa King
Harvey, Illinois

Seat Belts on Buses?

I've been driving buses for 39 years now. Should seat belts on school buses be required? (Debate, October). I'm not sure. But I do know that the seats and seat belts currently in use need to be redesigned before any law is passed.

Automatic retractors and receiving buckles need to be built into the seat frame. They need to be made so they can be buckled with one hand and adjusted automatically. And they need to remain locked until they are released either by the driver or an attendant.

Otherwise, seat belts are simply another emotional, political waste of money—money that would be better spent on driver compensation and training. The best safety device is still a well-trained, professional driver.

John Lovely
Flagstaff, Arizona

I'm appalled that you left the seat belt issue to opinion. You should have included the strong statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics in favor of restraints. When my eighth graders researched the issue, they came down firmly on the side of passenger restraints and disregarded the old argument about kids hitting kids with the buckles.

NEA Today erred in presenting this subject so cavalierly.

Marjorie Montgomery
Newton Corner, Massachusetts

Point About Incentives

I have concerns about the teacher who issues incentive points to students whose parents attend school functions (Families & Communities, September).

Although that may induce some parents to participate, it's not fair for those whose parents are unable to attend gatherings due to work, illness, family emergencies, and the like. I certainly wouldn't want to grade a student's achievement based upon the parent's ability or willingness to come to school.

Jeanne Maersch
Bonduel, Wisconsin

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of five ways:

- By mail: Write to Letters, NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- Through the Web: Go to www.nea.org/neatoday and click on "Submit a Letter to the Editor"
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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

A Letter from: Salem, Massachusetts

Flunking the Teacher Test

By Clarke Fowler

Michael Quan

This past summer, the media widely reported that 59 percent of Massachusetts preservice teachers failed tests of basic literacy skills and of subject matter knowledge.

Many saw these dismal results as an explanation for the long-rumored failure of American education. Students aren't learning enough, they reasoned, because teachers just don't know enough.

But what hasn't been as widely—or as loudly—reported are the many reasons for doubting the validity of these shockingly high failure rates.

To begin with, there were serious problems with the way the test was administered. Test-takers were originally told the test wouldn't count. Two weeks before the exam, they were told it would. Even with two weeks notice, students couldn't prepare for the exam because no study guide was available.

Finally, because most candidates took both parts of this test—literacy and subject area—in one day, they had to spend more than eight hours under testing conditions.

Next, two kinds of evidence suggest that this test has misidentified competent people as incompetent. First, many obviously well qualified people "failed" the exam.

The most remarkable case: Dr. Nancy Schmeing. Although she received her Ph.D. in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a Fulbright scholar, has more than 20 publications to her credit, speaks four languages, and translates legal documents from German into English, she failed the reading portion of the Massachusetts test. (She passed the writing and subject portions with ease.)

Second, the July version of the exam showed that the April exam was wrong more than half the time when scores declared that a candidate was either an inadequate reader or writer.

Let me explain: A whopping 57 percent of the candidates who failed the reading section in April passed when they took it again in July. And 52 percent who re-took the writing section in July also passed.

These circumstances have led many to question this exam. Still, National Evaluation Systems (NES), the test's maker, continues to repeat its claim that the test is valid and reliable.

But the company has refused to release any data whatsoever to support its claims. That's like a baseball manager claiming that his first baseman is a good hitter, all the while refusing to reveal his batting average.

Unfortunately, most mainstream reporters haven't reported the many doubts that have been raised about this test. Indeed, many in the media appear to believe that all tests are created perfect, and that anyone who questions this test in particular is blocking the road to high standards.

I support having an exam as part of a system that holds teacher educators like me accountable for the candidates we graduate from our schools. I say this because I have encountered—at both elite and non-elite institutions—too many students who neither write nor spell as well as they should.

The test we've got now doesn't provide us with an accurate account of teacher candidates' abilities—an account that could serve as the basis for an informed discussion about how to improve teacher education.

Instead, Massachusetts has provided us with a wildly exaggerated account of our weaknesses that has served as the basis for the most frenzied episode of educator bashing that I have ever witnessed.

This fiasco raises many questions, but I'd like to close by asking this one: If it's appropriate to require that teachers meet minimal standards—and it is—shouldn't we also require that testmakers and their tests meet minimal standards?

If you ask me, I think it's time to think about developing a mechanism for certifying the tests that, increasingly, we are using to certify teachers.

NEA member Clarke Fowler is a professor of early childhood education at Salem State College in Massachusetts. He can be reached via E-mail at clarke.fowler@salem.mass.edu.

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